

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**Interview with Arlette Grossfeld  
December 18, 2014  
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## PREFACE

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## **ARLETTE GROSSFELD**

### **December 18, 2014**

Gail Schwartz: This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Volunteer Collection interview with Arlette Grossfeld. It is being conducted by Gail Schwartz on December 18, 2014 in Potomac, Maryland. This is track number one. What is your full name?

Arlette Grossfeld: Arlette Grossfeld. Can you hear me?

Q: Yes, you are sounding fine. What name were you born with?

A: **Zarnowski.**

Q: Where were you born?

A: In France.

Q: In what city or what town?

A: A suburb of Paris, **Samorre.**

Q: When were you born?

A: When? February 7, 1930.

Q: 1930? Let's talk a little bit about your family. Tell me your parents' names.

A: Wolf Zarnowski, my father.

Q: His first name is?

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A: Wolf.

Q: Ok and was he born in Paris?

A: No. He was born I believe in Poland.

Q: Do you know where in Poland?

A: I don't remember the town in Poland.

Q: And your mother?

A: Caroline Gold.

Q: And was she born in France?

A: Poland.

Q: She also. And do you know where she was born?

A: No, not really.

Q: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

A: One brother.

Q: And his name?

A: Lucien Zarnowski.

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Q: Was he older or younger?

A: Younger.

Q: How much younger?

A: Five years.

Q: Five years. What kind of work did your father do?

A: He was a furrier.

Q: He had his own business?

A: Yes.

Q: Did your mother work with him?

A: No.

Q: Was your family a very religious family?

A: No, not very, well not very religious. My grandparents were extremely religious.

Q: Both sides were religious?

A: Well my grandfather.

Q: Did you observe any holidays?

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A: I mean we practiced yeah, things like that.

Q: Like what?

A: Every holidays and everything, not too much.

Q: Do you have any special holiday that you liked as a child?

A: As a child?

Q: Did you have a favorite holiday that you liked?

A: All of them were good, yeah. Passover.

Q: And when you celebrated Passover were there other relatives around?

A: Yes, all the relatives.

Q: So there was what we call an extended family. Did you have aunts and uncles and cousins?

A: Yes.

Q: Nearby. Did you see them frequently?

A: Oh yes, yes.

Q: Let's talk about your schooling. What kind of school did you go to? A public school or a religious school?

A: You see in Europe, that's the way.

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Q: You started off as, at age five?

A: Six.

Q: Six. Ok. And did you speak French at home?

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you speak Yiddish at all?

A: Not too much.

Q: Did your parents speak Yiddish?

A: Yeah, yeah, they did.

Q: So you understood?

A: Yeah.

Q: What other interests did you have as a child? Did you like to read or play any games?

A: Games, I think. Yeah, read too, also. I liked to read also.

Q: You liked to read? Did you have any special books that you liked?

A: Oh I can't remember. I still like to read.

Q: Wonderful. Books in French. Children's books in French.

A: Yeah.

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Q: What about, who were your friends? Did you have Jewish and non-Jewish friends, both?

A: Yeah, we did have non-Jewish friends also.

Q: Did you play at their houses? Go to their houses?

A: Yeah, we were friends.

Q: What about sports?

A: No, not too good. I went swimming.

Q: You liked to go swimming? That's good.

A: Played tennis but I wasn't good at it.

Q: But you did it.

A: For fun. Just because I was -- we had fun.

Q: Did you have any close friends, girl friends?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: What were some of their names?

A: Oh that, you mean in Europe? In Europe, you mean?

Q: When you were a child.



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A: Quite a few, Yvette. One was Simone.

Q: Do you remember their last names?

A: No, well yes. Yvette Klein. That was a long time ago.

Q: Yes. Was there any anti-Semitism that you noticed when you were very young?

A: I'm sure there was but I don't think I noticed it, we noticed it. We weren't treated badly or anything but in the war. In the war.

Q: Did you feel very Jewish as a young child growing up? I mean you knew you were Jewish.

A: Oh yeah, I knew I was Jewish.

Q: Did you have any Jewish education? Did you go to Hebrew school?

A: No. My brother went.

Q: Your brother did?

A: Yeah, yeah. They didn't, girls mostly.

Q: It was the boys.

A: Yeah he was, he was bar mitzvahed. The usual, a Jewish family.

Q: What year was he born?

A: 1935.

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Q: He was born in 35 so, ok so he was bar mitzvahed in 48, after the war? You had kind of a quiet childhood in this suburb of Paris you said.

A: Yes.

Q: And things were going along.

A: We had a good childhood.

Q: A good childhood. Was the neighborhood a Jewish and non-Jewish, a mixed neighborhood?

A: Mixed, mixed.

Q: Did you live in a house or an apartment?

A: An apartment.

Q: How would you describe your family? Were you middle class, upper class, upper middle?

A: Middle, middle middle.

Q: Middle, middle. Did your mother have any help in the apartment?

A: No.

Q: No, she didn't. Ok. But you had a telephone?

A: Yeah.

Q: And a car? Did you have a car?

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A: Yeah, at the end we had for a while. I even forgot. Yeah.

Q: When did you start hearing about a man named Hitler? Do you remember when that was, when you first heard?

A: Because we were children in 38, 39. We had the radio, what was going on.

Q: Up to that time it was a normal childhood, going to school and playing with friends.

A: Yeah.

Q: The neighbors were fine. No anti-Semitic –

A: I never knew anti-Semitism at that time.

Q: And then comes 19, so you hadn't heard of Hitler until 1938.

A: No.

Q: Were you old enough to know about Kristallnacht or not?

A: No.

Q: No, you were too young.

A: What did you say, Kristallnacht?

Q: Kristallnacht.

A: Yeah we heard about it.

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Q: You did? Was that very frightening?

A: I was young.

Q: I was going to say you were eight years old.

A: But you know people talked, the radio. I didn't know what it meant at that time.

Q: Did you understand any German? Or was it just French?

A: French.

Q: You did not understand German? Did you notice your parents getting more concerned? Did you notice a difference in your parents?

A: Yeah, yeah because you heard them talking. You heard talking and everything. My parents with friends.

Q: With friends. And what kind of things did they say? Do you remember what kind of, what some of the thoughts they expressed? What they said. They just talked about what was happening generally?

A: Right, yeah.

Q: Did any refugees come to your house, come to your –

A: Sometimes, yeah. They came from Germany, from Vienna. Yeah.

Q: These were relatives of yours.

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A: No. Oh my uncle came from Vienna and my grandparents. They lived in Vienna, my uncle. But you forget. And my grandparents. They were kicked out of Vienna.

Q: What was your uncle's name?

A: Gold. Neil Gold.

Q: Was that very frightening to a young girl to hear a story like that? Here's your uncle coming. Was it a frightening experience for you to know about your uncle having to leave and come to your place?

A: No, we didn't realize it this way. They were coming. I had an uncle coming.

Q: They were visiting.

A: We were too young to understand. We heard Hitler, that's all they were talking about at that time. You know. We knew there was but we didn't really realize too much at the time. I was eight years old.

Q: You were eight years old, ok. So when did conditions start to change? When did you notice things weren't –

A: When they invaded France. That was 40 or 41.

Q: 1940. So in 1939 when the war started in Poland and Hitler invaded Poland, do you have any memories of hearing that?

A: No.

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Q: You don't. So your life went on normally? At that point. Ok now let's talk about the Germans invading France. So you were still in your, you were still living where you had grown up?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: And what was the first change that you noticed?

A: About 41 I think, we went south, south of France because it wasn't occupied at that time.

Q: What did you notice, before you went south? Did you notice any changes in your town, any signs, any flags?

A: No, no until –

Q: No swastikas, no –

A: No. That came later.

Q: Were there any German soldiers in your town? Before you left?

A: Not before I left, no. But they came later. 41, 42.

Q: Your parents tell you that you're going to have to move?

A: Yeah.

Q: You and your brother are going to have to move? How did you feel about that?

A: Not too happy.

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Q: Did you understand why or –

A: Oh yeah.

Q: What reason did they give you?

A: The truth, the Germans are coming and we have to hide \_\_\_\_\_, something like that.

Q: You are what, 11, aren't you 11 years old then.

A: And first we went down to the south, Nice, the south of France.

Q: That was your first stop?

A: Yeah, that wasn't occupied right away. It was in French hands still handled this. But then it became –

Q: Let's do it slowly.

A: What's that? The town of **Po**, but we weren't there long. It's a town that we came first.

Q: When you left Paris, you went to

A: When we left Paris.

Q: How long did you stay there?

A: In Po, I don't even remember this detail for some times. I knew I was there.

Q: When you left your house outside of Paris, did you take anything special with you – a special, books or toys or, I mean you were only 11. What did you bring with you?

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A: No. But we need clothes, some toys, things like that. We couldn't do all this.

Q: You couldn't carry a lot.

A: Right. No, we could not.

Q: Did you have a special toy that you liked, that you brought with you or something?

A: A special toy? I don't remember.

Q: What was your brother's reaction and of course he was much younger.

A: His reaction. He didn't realize at first

Q: He was so little.

A: I didn't realize too much either. We knew there was a war. We knew we had to go. Some things like that.

Q: Were you able to say goodbye to your friends?

A: Not all, not all no. some of them were in the same situation that we were. Have you seen the, on television, people walking? They called it, I forgot the name for that. They used to walk, walk south. When the war started.

Q: The refugees would walk south.

A: We took a train. We were lucky.

Q: You went by train from Paris to Nice?



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A: From Paris, yeah. But a lot of people decided to leave Paris because the Germans were coming. Everybody, not only Jews and they walked. A lot of them had to walk, whatever they could. It was no fun.

Q: Did you have enough food on the trip, going south?

A: Yes, at first, yes. We were the lucky ones, my brother and I.

Q: You were lucky because?

A: Because we had food. We were in a farm. We lived in a farm during the war.

Q: I'm talking about on your way down.

A: Oh, on the way.

Q: We're still on your trip down south.

A: We can't remember those details. Yeah, I think we did have (both talking)

Q: So your mother contend and packed enough food.

A: Yeah.

Q: This was a passenger train that you had tickets for? Ok. And your after we went through Po, then you went down to Nice.

A: Yeah.

Q: Ok and let's talk a little bit about what that was like? Where did you live in Nice?

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A: Well actually we were happy in Nice for a while. A beautiful city. How long? My parents stayed there the whole war but they sent us to a farm. First --

Q: A nearby farm?

A: (both talking) start talking. Is that for me?

Q: Before you go to the farm. We'll get to the farm in a minute. Who else left with you when you left?

A: My aunt, cousin.

Q: Any other relatives? Grandparents?

A: Yeah of course.

Q: So there was a big group?

A: Yeah.

Q: Of cousins and aunts and uncles and grandparents.

A: Yeah.

Q: And you all stayed together?

A: Yes they were in Nice, too.

Q: And where did you live in Nice? In another apartment?

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A: An apartment.

Q: With all those other relatives? Or they stayed?

A: Yeah, not all in one room but yeah.

Q: How did you know, you were very young, I understand that but do you know how your parents got that apartment or not? Do you know how they were able to find that apartment? Did any organization –

A: Yeah we found apartment.

Q: Did any organization help them to find the apartment?

A: Maybe. I was too young –

Q: Right so –

A: Things children don't know about that. I know we had an apartment.

Q: Did you start to go to school? In Nice?

A: Yeah, I went to school.

Q: What did the other children say to you?

A: They didn't care. Children don't care. Children don't care in that –

Q: You fit right in with the other children.

A: Yeah. Well they're all French. We spoke French with children and it's not --.

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Q: And the teachers were pleasant?

A: Yeah. Normal, strict but they were all right.

Q: Again, no anti-Semitism.

A: No, not that, no.

Q: Did you see any posters in the ---

A: Children don't realize that there was anti-Semitism. I think, no.

Q: Nobody ever said anything nasty to you?

A: No, no. Oh I know what you mean like Jew or something like that. Not to me

Q: Not to you?

A: Not to me personally. I'm sure there was.

Q: But you yourself did not experience it.

A: No, I did not.

Q: You were going to school and then you said you eventually went to a farm?

A: Yes.

Q: Where was that?

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A: In the middle of France, that's –

Q: A town or what area?

A: Yeah it was near Châteauroux, near a city Châteauroux, the middle of France, like. Not north or south. Just right in the –

Q: What reason did your parents give you for sending you to a farm?

A: Well, we're in danger here. You will be safer in a farm. And that was my cousin too but he was in a different farm. Another friend. There was a few Jewish children too.

Q: So a group of Jewish children were put on farms?

A: Hunh, some of them that we knew because Jewish children, were -- they hide them, for them to be safe. It was a good thing.

Q: How did you feel about leaving your parents?

A: Oh, it was hard but the child gets used to everything. I was with my brother, with my cousin, you know and there were friends of my parents there that sent us, that found the farm for us. So we did, we did the best of this.

Q: The family that owned the farm.

A: They were very nice, yeah.

Q: What were their names?

A: Their name. **Marchais.**

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Q: That was the family name of the people who owned the farm?

A: Yes. Can I look at this?

Q: Well that's what I was going to ask you. In Nice did any of the soldiers, German or Italian soldiers.

A: Italian.

Q: Italian soldiers came?

A: Yes.

Q: And what happened. Describe what happened.

A: We knew about that. The Italian occupied us also yeah.

Q: They came to your apartment?

A: Not the Italian. At that time they didn't come because the children were not down in Nice yet. They just occupied Paris and –

Q: Did any soldiers come to your place in Nice?

A: In Nice? Let me think.

Q: And they were looking for children. Did they –

A: Yes, yes, I think not.

Q: Did you see them come to your place?

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A: No but I knew they came. We weren't home.

Q: You weren't home and then you heard later that they were looking?

A: Yes.

Q: For you?

A: For about 42, 43, we were all right more or less.

Q: You were still in Nice at that point?

A: Yes.

Q: And then you went —

A: So my father had friends, like that were already there so they found a farm for us and my cousin. We were in different farms. Next, practically next to each other, cause no farmer would take a lot of kids. I was with my brother, my cousin and another one and another friend and another one too.

Q: Let's talk about life on the farm. Did you have to work?

A: No.

Q: You did not have to work?

A: Hunh.

Q: You didn't have to do any jobs around the farm.

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A: No, no.

Q: Did you go to school?

A: No.

Q: Were you able to use your name? Were you still Arlette?

A: No, no.

Q: You had a different name?

A: We had a different name here.

Q: What was your name?

A: **Romanier.**

Q: Was that the last name?

A: That was the last name.

Q: What was your first name?

A: The same.

Q: Oh, you kept Arlette?

A: Yeah.



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Q: You kept Arlette. You just changed, was that the name of the people that owned the farm?

A: Yeah.

Q: Tell me about that family, the farm family, what you remember.

A: They were very good to us. We were fortunate. Yeah, even my cousin. They were all very good those people.

Q: Did they have children themselves?

A: Grown up. One daughter. She was 20.

Q: Was it hard for you to take a new name?

A: Hunh.

Q: Was it difficult for you to take a new name?

A: No, no it was like a play or something, but my father explained to us that we couldn't keep because they had you know ration for food so we had our names Zarnowski but that we would have been caught right away so we took another name.

Q: Did you feel very Jewish then, when you were on the farm?

A: The farm. No. We were children, we were happy.

Q: Was the family a Catholic family?

A: Yes.

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Q: Did you go to church with them?

A: A few times yes.

Q: What was that like?

A: Something different. It takes like a child you know (both talking) things like that. Ok that's another thing.

Q: Another thing to do.

A: But they weren't religious. We went like for Christmas a few times, a few holidays you know.

Q: Did you learn any of the prayers?

A: No.

Q: What did you do every day? Just play with the other children?

A: Yeah. Little chores, somewhat.

Q: What were some of the chores?

A: Like in the field.

Q: What did you do?

A: We helped them plant, things like that or something. Nothing major.

Q: Were there any frightening experiences that happened then?

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A: At the farm? No.

Q: No soldiers came by?

A: No. No.

Q: What kind of connection or communication did you have with your parents? Were they able to –

A: We wrote letters. I wrote letters (both talking)

Q: And did they come and visit?

A: No, they couldn't. It was too dangerous to take a train from one direction because they were checking the trains, the Germans. Not only for the Jews, in general.

Q: What kind of identification papers did you have? Did you have your own ID picture?

A: Just a card for food.

Q: Just a ration card for food.

A: You didn't need papers with the children. You know. We had no papers.

Q: Let's just go over. You went in 43. When did you go to the farm in –

A: It was either 42 or 43, it was, yeah.

Q: You were 12, 13?

A: Yeah.

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Q: Did you miss your parents a lot?

A: Yeah of course.

Q: It must have been very hard.

A: Yeah but they were very good to us, those people. Very.

Q: Were they affectionate with you?

A: Yeah, especially with my brother. The farmer loved my brother. He took him all over. He was good. He didn't have a son so it was like his son. Like I said, we were the fortunate ones. In a way you know because a lot of kids suffered.

Q: While the war was going on and you were on the farm, did you know what was happening in the rest of Europe?

A: Not really, I don't think we knew.

Q: Did they get the newspapers or listen to the radio, the family?

A: No.

Q: So you really were in your own little world out there in the countryside?

A: Yeah, come to think about yeah. We were in the normal. We didn't suffer. We missed our parents but we didn't suffer.

Q: What about going into town?

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A: We went sometimes with them. We even went to a movie sometimes in the town.

Q: Do you remember what the movies were?

A: No.

Q: You still felt very French.

A: Yeah, yeah mm hm. It was a country that was good to us and you know too, the Italians were good to us also.

Q: Tell me about your experience with them, with the Italians.

A: They never bothered us. They never did anything to me. They were not too anti-Semitic.

Q: How did you communicate? Did you ever talk to any of the Italian soldiers?

A: Not really like children talk or something. We were not old enough to be adults to discuss certain things with them. We were children.

Q: You did go to school?

A: No, not school, not from the farm. It was too dangerous because they came to school to take children out.

Q: The German soldiers came to the school?

A: Oh yeah, \_\_\_\_\_. They would get to schools to get children there, looked at their names or something so nobody went or for a while. For a while but then we didn't.

Q: You stayed how long on the farm?

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A: Two years.

Q: Two years. So you did not see your parents for two years?

A: No, no. they came pick us up in 45. I remember that. When the war was over. The Americans had landed and –

Q: Did they talk about D-Day, June 1944? When D-Day happened in the north of France in June of 1944? Do you have memories of that? Or hearing about it?

A: Yeah. (both talking) Everybody was happy.

Q: And did you celebrate or do anything special?

A: Oh yeah they celebrated.

Q: How did you celebrate?

A: Nothing. We went with them. They had a nice meal. They were happy.

Q: This is the family you stayed with?

A: Yeah we were still there with the family.

Q: When you were on the farm and the farmer's friends would come to the house.

A: Sometimes.

Q: What did the farmers say to these people who you were.

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A: Nothing. It's not uncommon for farmer before the war to take children and you know because the parents worked. The mother works. She would send them on the farm and – it was not an unusual thing in France.

Q: It was you and your brother? Any other children in that particular family? Was it just the two of you?

A: In this particular farm.

Q: Just you two. There weren't other children.

A: Nothing with us but like one kilometer. My cousin was not too far away.

Q: You were able to see –

A: Sometimes, yeah we saw each other. Yeah.

Q: Which cousin, what was the name of this cousin who was nearby?

A: Cousin. Lucien.

Q: Same last name or different?

A: No, no. Not the same.

Q: What was the last name?

A: **Arenstein**. Yeah.

Q: And when you got together with your cousin did you talk about being away from your family or –

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A: I don't remember. We played like children did. Things like that.

Q: So now it's June 44. It's D-Day and you celebrated. And then how did life change after that?

A: We went back home to Paris. Our parents picked us up.

Q: You didn't go to Nice?

A: No. They came to get us. They were in Nice.

Q: Your parents stayed in Nice?

A: My parents. When the war was over, they come up to pick us up.

Q: They came to the farm? Tell me what you remember about seeing them after two years?

A: Very happy. We were very happy.

Q: Was your mother very emotional?

A: Yeah, of course, yeah.

Q: And you and your brother obviously looked different. You were two year older.

A: My brother was like, they almost didn't recognize him. He was young. He was very attached to the farmer, my brother. In the morning he took him to the fields. He missed him after we left, the farmer.

Q: Did you become attached to the mother, the wife?



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A: My brother visited them a few years, when, after the war when he got married. He went back to France to -- yeah.

Q: Were you very close to the wife in the family, the farmer's wife?

A: Yeah.

Q: What was she like to you? Did she include you? Did she teach you how to cook? Did she --

A: No, but we have, if we want. She was a good cook. \_\_\_\_\_ She cooked everything.

Q: Did you have your own room, your own bedroom?

A: No, he shared my -- it wasn't that big. With my brother.

Q: You shared a room with your brother?

A: We shared.

Q: He was happy?

A: Yeah.

Q: Did he cry for your parents? Did he ever cry for your --

A: I don't remember. Maybe in the beginning he did.

Q: Did you talk about your parents a lot with him?

A: I don't remember.

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Q: You said you wrote letters. I guess, was he able to – was he old enough to read and write?

A: No I think I did the writing. He was younger.

Q: You said he's five years younger.

A: Yeah.

Q: Now your parents have come and seen you after all those years. And were they paying the farmer and his wife?

A: Yeah. All of them, the parents paid, they paid the farmers yeah.

Q: And then you go back to Paris?

A: Yeah.

Q: When was that? Do you remember?

A: 45, it was 45.

Q: Do you know what month?

A: Right after, no.

Q: But the war was over?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: Any celebrations when you heard that the war was over?

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A: No, but when we came to Paris, there was dancing in the streets, they were so happy. Yeah.

Q: You went by train from –

A: Yeah.

Q: And where did you stay then in Paris?

A: We got our apartment back.

Q: You went back to your, oh my. Did it look the same?

A: Yeah.

Q: And was all the furniture there?

A: No, no, no come to think about because the Germans took out all the furniture, from -- they empty. They did a good job, yeah.

Q: So you came back to an empty apartment?

A: Yeah, but remember now because we got furniture again. We had to get –

Q: What was your parents' reaction to walk into an empty apartment?

A: They weren't happy.

Q: You moved in and you started life again?

A: Yeah, life, before, just like before. We kept everything up. My father worked. We went to school.

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Q: What happened to his business?

A: He worked again, he started to work again.

Q: In the same place, was his store in the same place?

A: Yeah. Then it was normal.

Q: What about the French neighbors? Were they welcoming you? When you came back did the French neighbors welcome you back?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: They were glad to see you.

A: Yeah they were very glad to see us.

Q: You went back to your old school?

A: Yeah we went back to everything like before. We had to go to school. He had to work, my father had to work. And then he decided to come to America. Later on.

Q: But you stayed in France until –

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: What happened when your parents found out about the destruction of the Jews? Do you know if your parents had any reaction, what they thought, did they say anything special when they found out what happened to the Jews of Europe, you know the terrible –

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A: Oh terrible.

Q: Did they talk about it with you?

A: Oh yeah everybody did.

Q: Cause you were older, I mean 15 when the war was over.

A: Oh yeah. 15 right.

Q: What kind of things did they say?

A: Oh it was terrible, the things they found out. But you should know, right. What they did and everything.

Q: But I meant did they discuss this with you as a teenager?

A: Not really. They didn't discuss with children certain things.

Q: In those days you didn't discuss with children. Did they lose any family, any relatives?

A: My father did a lot, yeah my mother too.

Q: Who did they lose?

A: My mother lost a sister and a brother. My father lost almost all his family.

Q: These were family that were in Poland? Or?

A: No, no, not in Poland. No, they died right away because Poland was the first.

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Q: The first, in 39. Yes.

A: They lost some relatives.

Q: Because those people stayed in Poland?

A: Yeah, yeah. My father didn't like Poland. When he was 18 he left. And he came to France. He was more French because the French were good to him. There's not that much, I'm sure I'm not a fool that there is anti-Semitism but not really that bad you know and here we are.

Q: Fortunately he did come to France.

A: For telling you.

Q: Did you have any relatives in Amsterdam?

A: Yes, my aunt.

Q: What was her name?

A: Oh no it's the Hague.

Q: The Hague.

A: What is her name?

Q: What happened to her?

A: Oh she died.

Q: Do you know where?

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A: Most Jews perished, you know.

Q: Do you know where she was taken?

A: She has a name, sure. What did you ask me? What was her name?

Q: Do you know where she was taken and what her name was?

A: I don't know.

Q: You don't remember.

A: All those camps, all those things. At that time we were cut off from Holland. You couldn't communicate. And she had a daughter too.

Q: Did the daughter survive?

A: No. They did a good job.

Q: Yes, unfortunately. You stayed for how long in France?

A: After the war you mean? We came in 49.

Q: To the United States?

A: To the United States.

Q: And how did that happen? Did somebody sponsor you or how—

A: My uncle. He was in America. He sent for us.

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Q: On your mother's side or your father's side?

A: My mother's side.

Q: Your mother's brother?

A: Yeah.

Q: And his name?

A: He sent us and my aunt and cousin. About eight people, he sponsored us.

Q: Up to that time, you were back in your old apartment, going to school?

A: Well until we left. We were normal after that for a while. But my father wanted to leave. He was so upset over everything. He wanted to leave Europe.

Q: He wanted to leave Europe, but what about your mother? Did she want to stay?

A: No, no. People were afraid. There was always wars in Europe, always wars. That's what my father said. He said that and I was so, you know have to go and things like that. So here we are.

Q: In 1949, you said you came to the United States? How did you get here?

A: Boat.

Q: What was the name of the boat?

A: Oh. You know I can't remember all those things. It was a nice boat. We had fun on it.



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Q: Were there a lot of children on the boat?

A: Not, not a whole lot. There was but not a lot.

Q: How long did the voyage take?

A: Eight days, a week. I can remember.

Q: And so you came? And where did you – to New York. The boat docked in New York?

A: In New York.

Q: And then what happened? Was your uncle there to greet?

A: No, we start to live normally. We had an apartment, Brooklyn.

Q: You went to Brooklyn? Is that where your uncle was in Brooklyn?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: And was your father able to get a job?

A: Yeah, he worked as a furrier. He worked.

Q: He worked. Now did you speak any English?

A: I did a little because we had taken it in school, me and my cousin.

Q: After the war you took English in school?

A: Yeah, yeah.

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Q: So you could speak?

A: It's like here. They take a language when they go to, so we did too. Yeah, we could manage in English. We understood at least and then young people learn fast.

Q: I know. Did you want to leave also? Your parents wanted to leave. Were you happy or unhappy about leaving?

A: We didn't know. We were confused. We wanted to stay and then we wanted to leave. But we got used right away to New York. We were happy when we came.

Q: Did you see the Statue of Liberty?

A: Yeah.

Q: What did that mean to a teenager?

A: They don't stop you at the Statue of Liberty any more. You just pass it.

Q: What did that mean to a teenager? You were a teenage girl at that time. What did that statue mean? Did it have any meaning to you?

A: Yeah, I said of the freedom. It was nice to look to see it, to look at it. Something different.

Q: What did you know about the United States when you came? Did you know anything?

A: A little bit but not too much.

Q: You said you were able to make friends easily?

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A: Oh yeah.

Q: Where did you go to school?

A: I didn't go here.

Q: You didn't go to high school?

A: I was finished. I was 19. I finished in Europe. I was all done by that time. My brother went to school.

Q: Did you get a job? Did you work?

A: Yeah.

Q: What kind of work?

A: My uncle was a doctor. In his office I worked.

Q: And then you stayed there? You lived at home and worked in your uncle's office. And then what happened? How long did you stay at home?

A: I was 19. About two, three years. Then I got married.

Q: Tell me how you met your husband. Was your husband from Europe?

A: Yeah. My friends knew him. I got married – I met him at friends.

Q: You met him through friends? Where was he from?

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A: Poland.

Q: Poland also. What city or what town?

A: Poland, from Poland.

Q: What town?

A: Radom. You know Poland?

Q: Yeah, Radom sure.

A: Your family is from Poland?

Q: No. and when had he come to the United States?

A: He came about the same time, but I didn't know him then but he came in 49 also.

Q: What was his experience during the war?

A: Oh, he had it bad. He was in a camp.

Q: He was. Do you know which camp?

A: A few, Auschwitz. I think it was Auschwitz.

Q: Was he in Dachau?

A: He was to a few, I don't remember. I know he was in Auschwitz too. Yeah and his brother at his side.

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Q: Did his brother survive?

A: Yeah.

Q: And your husband's name?

A: Philip Grossfeld. Was he dead now, his brother and him. But they really had it bad.

Q: You met and was he working when you met him?

A: Yeah.

Q: What kind of work did he do?

A: He was a decorator.

Q: Of houses.

A: Yeah. Well he had a store where they made drapes and things like that.

Q: So then you got married. Tell me about your wedding.

A: Oh it was a nice wedding.

Q: Where did it take place?

A: In Brooklyn. We're all from Brooklyn.

Q: In your parents' apartment or in a –

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A: No, no, in a place, in a synagogue.

Q: In a synagogue ok. And did a lot of people come?

A: Not that much.

Q: Was your husband about your age? How old was your husband?

A: How old was he? He was a little older.

Q: And then where did you two live after you got married?

A: In Brooklyn again.

Q: Were you able to afford your own place?

A: Yeah, we had our own apartment.

Q: And you both were working?

A: Yeah.

Q: And then what happened?

A: I got pregnant. I had children.

Q: And your children's names?

A: Gail, Joan here and Robin. I have a few.

Q: So you have three children?

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A: Six.

Q: Six children. Oh my goodness, that's wonderful.

A: All grown up now.

Q: So you stayed in New York and did you stay home or were you, did you continue to work or you stayed home with the six children?

A: I stayed home.

Q: Did you ever work again –

A: I worked at the bank when they grew up.

Q: After they grew up you worked at a bank?

A: Yeah.

Q: And then have you retired yet or are you still working?

A: No, I'm retired.

Q: You stayed in the New York area?

A: Always yes.

Q: Can we talk a little bit about some of your thoughts about what you went through. Do you think about the war time years now that you, it's so long ago? You don't think about it?

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A: No. it's over.

Q: It's over. Do you feel very French or do you feel American?

A: I don't know.

Q: Do you feel Jewish?

A: Yeah, I mix up everything.

Q: How did you raise your children? Did you raise your children –

A: Jewish.

Q: They had a Jewish education.

A: Yeah.

Q: What are your thoughts about Germany today?

A: We don't talk about it.

Q: Because. Why don't you talk about it?

A: They did too horrible things. What could we say? I guess to everybody, not only us. It was a bad war. Most people suffered. There's nothing really to say. The only thing we didn't have it so bad. We were lucky that way. We weren't killed, we weren't tortured. That's all. What can you say?

Q: Do you get reparations? Do you receive any reparations from Germany, any monthly –



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A: My husband did because he was in a camp. You had to be in a camp to get money from Germany.

Q: So he did? Do you continue to get his reparation?

A: No.

Q: No. Once he passed away it stopped.

A: Finished. That's not fair, right. Oh he got, cause Poland got, only those who were in a camp

Q: Have you been back to France?

A: Yeah, two years ago we went.

Q: Was that the first time that you went?

A: No, I've been there a few times we have gone.

Q: You have gone back to visit?

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you go back to visit the farm family?

A: We did, the last time. They're not alive any more.

Q: What was it like, seeing the farm again?

A: Oh, very exciting and yeah, very nice.

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Q: Did you walk around and it bring back memories?

A: Yeah, yeah. We just missed them because she, Jeanne just died, the woman.

Q: The wife, the farmer's –

A: The wife, yes. Yeah. So that's what \_\_\_\_.

Q: What about your brother? Has he been back?

A: Yeah he went back before me even.

Q: Where does he live?

A: Now you mean. He's in North Carolina. He moved there.

Q: When you talk to him, do you talk about the war years when you two, when you and your brother are together now do you ever talk about what happened during the war when you were children?

A: Not too often, not too often. We're alive. We're lucky and we're happy. What's the point? It's the past really. That's so many years ago. You don't forget.

Q: Do you think it could happen again?

A: I don't know. Do you? What do you think? You seem smart. You never know.

Q: Tell me what it was like to become a citizen. You're an American citizen?

A: Yeah.

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Q: Tell me what that was like when you became an American citizen.

A: It was nice. It was good. You know. I remember I was sick when I went there.

Q: This is in New York.

A: Yeah. I had a very bad cold with 104 but you cannot postpone. If, isn't that silly. If you don't go you could not get citizen. If you don't go at the time that they give you. So there I was, 104, a nasty judge. Yeah, he wasn't nice, nothing personal but he just wasn't nice. I remember that

Q: What kind of questions did he ask you?

A: Oh I don't remember. They give you a little book. They were not hard questions. You know, they were. Here we are.

Q: Did you become citizens when your parents and your brother became. Did you all four go together?

A: All of us, yeah. A lot of French criticized us for that, friends.

Q: Did you have to give up your French citizenship?

A: No, I think let's say if we went back to France, they wouldn't recognize the American citizenship. I think, yeah.

Q: Are you more comfortable being around people who came from Europe like you did and –

A: No, no. All those years I made friends American –

Q: Who were born in America?

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A: Yes.

Q: You feel just as close to them as you do people who didn't share what you went through?

A: Yeah, yeah. People who didn't a lot of, we're here longer than we were in France all of us.

Q: During the civil rights movement in the United States during the 60s and the 70s. I know you have all these children at home, but were you active at all at that time. I mean here your civil rights were taken away when you had to leave.

A: Oh no, I wasn't active.

Q: You weren't because you had a whole lot of children, yes, I understand.

A: Not at all. The 60s were a lot of changes.

Q: I ask because here you were, your civil rights were taken away and you had to escape to a farm. Have you been to the Holocaust Museum in Washington?

A: No I don't think so. Was I? With who, with you or with Gail? Oh yeah. That was pretty bad.

Q: Would you be a different person today do you think if you hadn't gone through what you went through? Here you were separated from your parents. You said two years. Did that make you into a different person, and maybe a stronger person or not?

A: I don't think it affected me.

Q: It did not affect you?

A: No, no. Either we were too young for that to be affected. I think I would be the same. No, it

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was a bad experience, yes. But compared to, I always tell them, compared to what other people we were very lucky. We didn't suffer because it was terrible, even for non-Jew. They were starving. They did a lot of bad things, the German, to everybody. Or came more to the Jews, but they did to everybody I think. Terrible. Unbelievable things, I think.

Q: Is there any message you wanted to leave to your children or grandchildren?

A: I don't know because this is something we didn't have control what happened. Hopefully it will never happen something like that. Right. We had no control. It happened to a lot of people. Their lives were changed I think.

Q: How did it affect your husband? He went through such terrible times. Was he bitter? Was he —

A: Well I didn't know him before

Q: That's true. As an adult was he angry or bitter about what —

A: I don't think it changed him. I don't know. A lot of people might be changed by such bad experience and everything.

Q: Do you still feel very French?

A: I like France but I didn't \_\_\_\_ I've been her much longer. I'll put it this way.

Q: Do you feel American?

A: Yes. I'm here very long. I've had children here and everything.

Q: Is there anything you wanted to say before we —

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A: No, but thank, it's been nice talking to you.

Q: It's been wonderful. I just wanted to say when your children were the age that you were, when you had to live Paris and when you were living on the farm as a young girl, when your children were that age, did that bring back memories for you? Did you think oh my when I was that age I was escaping from Paris or I was on the farm? Did that bring back any memories for you?

A: Sometimes, sometimes. But I feel like I said there were worse, worse things than what happened to me. We got to start to, not to think about this anymore. In the beginning maybe but we came but not -- It's amazing that I'm sorry, instinct. It's amazing that something like that happened, the war and everything and the things that was done to people, children and everything. You wouldn't believe that this could happen, that people could do those things to other people. But it's over.

Q: It's over. Do you read about the war at all or --

A: Sometimes, not particularly. I heard enough about the war.

Q: Or go to movies about it?

A: And at the time children don't react like a grownup. To a child they forget things where to a grown up it's more serious. I think. Right. But we're all here.

Q: We're all here. That's a nice note to end on that we're all here. Is there anything else you wanted to add before we close.

A: I don't think so.

Q: Ok well let me just close by saying that this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Arlette Grossfeld.

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(end)