

ZEZETTE LARSON
RG-50.243.0022 (recorded 1990)

Zezette Van de Sluis Larson was born in 1932 in Brussels, Belgium, the daughter of Ester de Rose and Henri. Her father was a salesman for a textile company; the family was not religious. She describes a warm loving family environment before the war. She has a brother Marcel, who is 4 years older, and survived the war because he was not home when they were sent to the camps. She has never talked about the war years with her brother. In all, she lost 49 family members.

Zezette has a memory of her father being used off the street by soldiers and of wearing the Jewish star. She was separated from her family and sent to a catholic convent until 1943 under the name Marguerite Michel and was baptized. She was able to get back to her parents on Easter Sunday 1943 to where they had been hiding, but they were caught by the Germans. They were first sent to Malines (Mechelen) for a few days and then on a train to Birkenau. She describes the horror of the train. Her mother was sent directly to the gas chamber on arrival. She saw her father once during her stay but then never again. She said she became a robot and only survived through luck. She said many other people with better literary skills have described the horrors of the camps so she did not.

Because she did not know Yiddish or German, only Dutch and French, it was difficult for her to communicate with others in the camp. There was sporadic support for each other but no real attachments. Zezette worked in the kitchen, carrying stones back and forth, and in an ammunition's factory. At the end of the war she marched with others to Ravensbrück and then towards Buchenwald. At one point she walked away from the group and into some American soldiers. She was very ill and spent 3 months in the hospital in Leipzig. She was found there by her aunt and uncle and her brother. Her aunt had been in Bergen-Belsen and she was the only person she talked to a little about her experiences. She admits it would have been healthier to speak more about her feelings.

Zezette lived in Holland with her aunt and uncle until 1950 when the CEO of her uncle's business sponsored her to go to the US. Her brother went to Indonesia but now lives in France. When she first arrived in NYC she didn't know any English and worked stuffing envelopes at Macy's. She eventually became very successful and earned her MSW. She has been back to Birkenau several times as part of "Facing History" which she says was very helpful to her.