

-TITLE-LAURA REICHER
-I_DATE-MAY 26, 1990
-SOURCE-SAN FRANCISCO HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
-RESTRICTIONS-
-SOUND_QUALITY-EXCELLENT
-IMAGE_QUALITY-GOOD
-DURATION-2 HOURS
-LANGUAGES-ENGLISH
-KEY_SEGMENT-
-GEOGRAPHIC_NAME-
-PERSONAL_NAME-
-CORPORATE_NAME-
-KEY_WORDS-
-NOTES-
-CONTENTS-

0:02:30 Laura Reicher was raised by her grandparents in Chateau-Meillant in the province of Berry. She received a lot of love and attention from her grandparents. Both of her grandparents were socialists.

0:03:39 Her grandfather was a doctor and a surgeon, and when the war began he became involved in the resistance movement. He supplied Jews with false identity papers, and helped them to pass from the occupied zone to the non-occupied zone.

0:05:40 Laura says that the Jews came to live in a part of the village that had previously been uninhabited. They lived side by side with the non-Jewish members of the village, and while everyone knew they were Jewish, and even knew their Jewish names, everyone felt it was their duty to protect the Jewish people from the Germans.

0:06:47 Laura says that the Jewish people in hiding in her village helped as much as they could, and because many of them were tailors they could turn a blanket into a winter coat. This helped a great deal because you could not buy these things with ration tickets.

Because the village was on the main road there were frequently German convoys coming through the village even though it was in the non-occupied zone. Each Jewish family had a shed assigned to them in the vineyards for when the convoys were particularly frequent.

0:08:13 She talks about the first time they ran into trouble with the Germans. The resistance had captured some German soldiers, who later escaped because the person guarding them became sympathetic when the soldiers spoke of their children at home. After the escape they came back with a convoy and demanded a ransom not to burn the village down. The wealthier villagers gave them money and they left.

0:10:15 Laura says that they used to listen to the BBC on a radio receiver they kept in the chicken coup. They would listen for messages concerning where weapons for the resistance would be dropped by British pilots. The main job of the resistance was acts of sabotage to slow the advance of the German army.

0:11:13 Laura remembers the second time Germans came to the village asking the police to supply them with the names of Jews in the village. When the police refused they were lined up against a wall, and all eleven of them were shot. She was thirteen when this happened.

0:13:40 Laura mentions a friend of hers, Marcus, who was about her age, and was a scout for the resistance, and alerted the village when Germans were coming.

0:16:00 Laura says that they had a Jewish family living in the back of their house. There were 700 Jews in the village out of an entire population of 2000. At night many of the Jews would go to sleep in the sheds in the vineyards because it was safer.

0:18:40 Laura talks about how she had been in boarding school in a larger town, but when the war started she returned to the village because it was safer. She says that because her grandfather was a doctor Germans passing on the road would frequently stop to get medical help.

0:24:44 She talks about when it was found out that the Germans had received a book with the names of all the resistance people from some collaborators. Her grandfather's name was in this book. He took her and her sister to a small Hamlet, which was difficult to find, and was much safer. In this Hamlet there were barracks where those who had been wounded in the resistance stayed. Her grandfather came every other day to treat people.

0:26:41 She talks about the day she will never forget: July 30, 1944. She was in the meadow by the Hamlet picking daisies when she heard a lot of noise. She knew something was wrong, she froze for a while, and then ran back to the village. That night some people from the village went to the Hamlet and found that everyone there had been shot. Her grandfather was among those killed. He was brought back to the village and buried in the family tomb where her mother was also buried (she had died when Laura was a little girl).

0:28:20 Laura talks about how she is a very life-centered person, and so was her grandfather. He had died doing what he thought was right, and most of all his death meant a huge deprivation for a lot of other people. Laura stayed with her grandmother until 1946 when her father returned from the war in Indo China.

0:31:51 After the war she went back to Paris with her father and her sister, and she went to a Catholic boarding school. She mentions that she is one quarter Jewish through her grandmother.

0:33:13 In boarding school she had a close friend, Evelyn Grossigner, who had actually been in her village in hiding during the war. The two of them were very close, and turned the school into the Board of Health for lack of hygiene and the rough way they were being treated.

0:34:26 She says that even though she said her prayers, her religion was socialist, and in her family they had never celebrated religious holidays. Her family was very anti-clerical.

0:38:40 She talks some about how when she was in boarding school in various places she lived with people in the villages because there was only room for the boys at the school. In many of these houses there were Jews in hiding. People did not talk much, but there was what she calls an "unspoken link," because she knew that they were in grave danger.

0:41:51 She talks about the Milice, which were an arm of the French police, created during the war. They were the "fascist thinking right wing supporters of the Petian regime." They did the dirty work for the Germans, such as finding out where Jews were in hiding, and who was involved in the resistance. In early 1944 in the village of Cenetemon(ph), the Milice rounded up most of the Jews in the village in the middle of the night and shot them all, and dumped the bodies in the gravel quarry. They were found about three weeks later because of the smell.

0:42:52 After the June 6 landing many of the resistance people thought that the war was over. Laura says that it was around this time that she went to the village of Cenetemon(ph) to watch a hanging of a Milice who had been involved in the killing of all the Jews.

0:47:51 She talks about the politics of her village, and how everyone felt it was their duty to protect the Jews. In other villages, and larger cities there was no one to protect the Jews. Very few of the Jews in her village were taken during the war.

0:52:35 Laura talks about her confusion about the passivity of the Jews. Very few of the Jews joined the resistance movement, and she did not understand why.

0:57:40 At the beginning of the war Laura says that there were very few people involved in the resistance movement. In her particular village there were only 14 people in the resistance when the war first started. After the allies became involved, especially the United States, many more people joined the resistance. She remembers an airfield near her village which had been taken over by the Germans, and all the young children would make bets about how long the planes taking off would stay in the air before the resistance blew them up. This kept up their spirits.

0:59:44 In 1946 she left the village with her father and sister. They had previously thought that her father was dead because they had not heard from him since 1936. During all those years her grandparents essentially took the place of her parents.

1:02:45 The last year of the war (before her father returned) she became involved in the resistance. She carried messages to various resistance camps on her bicycle. The main goal of the resistance at this time was to prevent the German army from getting North to where the allies had landed.

1:08:14 She met her husband, Jesse Reicher, in Paris. He is Jewish and she made a total conversion, which she considers a political statement more than anything else. She wants her name to be on the Jews of Paris at the Israelite Center. She says that if it happens again she wants to be treated like a Jew. Even today she says that she has to fight prejudice against German people because her tendency is to indict the entire German people.

1:14:54 She mentions an incident that happened in June 1944 in the Hamlet of Beddes where there was a small resistance camp. A Canadian man was being buried, and she was going to go to the funeral. On the way to the funeral she got the feeling that she should not go. She later found out that the Germans had come the Hamlet, demanded the names of resistance people, and when no one answered they shot them all.

1:20:40 She talks some more about her war experiences, and say that during the war when food was scarce they found inventive things to eat such as flowers and plants. There were always people in her house, either Jews in hiding or sick people being treated by her grandfather. Any person was welcome in the house, and no one was denied help.

1:24:24 She recalls that her grandfather had given her a gun, and if she was ever stopped by the Germans she was to put in into her mouth and shoot. She was not afraid to die, nor would she make compromises. These were things her grandfather had taught her.

1:29:42 Laura talks about how she does not feel at home in America, but when she goes back to Europe she also does not feel at home. The only place she feels at home is in nature. She is distracted and disgusted by architecture, and home is nature because it does not make hierarchical statements. She does not trust human beings, and she feels that her paranoia is healthy and warranted.

1:32:10 Laura runs a shelter for homeless people in San Francisco (I believe this is where she lives). She feels that these people have been cheated by human nature, and a system that is addicted to money and power. She mistrusts the powers, and wants to protect the victims.

1:34:35 Laura has worked hard to keep up her family tradition. She feels that the planet, and all the people on it have become worse since World War II, and that we have not learned anything from the past. We are repeating the same mistakes all over the world, including in Israel.

1:39:10 Laura says that when she was growing up people had a feeling of community, and people looked out for each other. People do not do this any more. She says that she is lucky because she and her husband have close relationship, but this is something that you do not see as often today.

1:42:22 In 1951 Laura came to the United States, and had nightmares for ten years about the day that she was picking daisies in the meadow. She also had nightmares about hiding Jews under piles of dead leaves.

1:45:46 She does not want to forget any of her experiences so she is writing a book about them. The book is not only about her war experiences, but it is about love which helps people to survive, and why it is lacking in today's world.

1:54:33 John Grant asks Laura about her parents. Her mother was a Mohawk Indian who was born in 1905 in Canada(I could not understand the name of the city in which she was born). She was brought up in a convent in Quebec, and became an organist. She won a prize which was a trip to France. It was on this trip that she stayed with Laura's grandparents, and met her husband. Her grandmother wanted a baby very badly, and when Laura was 11 days old her grandmother came to Paris, and took Laura from her mother. From that day on she was raised by her grandparents, who thought that Laura would have died living on the barge on the Seine with her parents. When Laura was 5 years old her mother died. At this time her sister also came to live in the village. Today her sister lives in France, but they are not close at all.

2:00:10 Laura's last remarks are that she worries that the values of fascism are still alive. She worries about German reunification without a strict guideline of regulations. She feels that anti-Semitism is still common, and she is not optimistic about the future because there is too much damage to be fixed.

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