

HVT- 164

V., Anne-Laure 1923-

Anne-Laure V. Holocaust video testimony (HVT-164) interviewed by Alex Cherney and Mitzi Melnick, March 25, 1996.

3 copies: 1 SVHS first camera, 1 SVHS second camera, 1 VHS copy

Summary: Hannelore (Anne-Laure) was born on December 18, 1923 in Berlin, Germany. Her parents raised their two children, Hannelore and Horst, in a wealthy, assimilated Jewish home. Their father was a successful banker. The family attended synagogue on Holidays, but did not keep kosher. Their large house on the outskirts of Berlin and their summer residence in Potsdam near the Emperor's castle, were the scenes of a rich social life including parties and cabarets. In the winter, they vacationed in Switzerland. The family employed a Protestant governess to care for the children and Hannelore was tutored privately. She was involved in a Zionist youth group and had many non-Jewish friends. The family spoke German.

In the early 30's, with the rising success of the NSDAP, Hannelore's mother refused to stay in Germany, but her father was needed and decided to stay. The rest of the family moved to Brussels to live with relatives in 1933. In Brussels, the names Hannelore and Horst were changed to Anne-Laure and Georges. They also renounced their German citizenship. In 1938, their father, who periodically visited them in Belgium, was expelled from the Berlin stock exchange and left Germany. In Belgium, he was not allowed to practice banking, so he imported a chemical product from Germany which removed the sheen from men's suits. His wife delivered the treated suits to customers. Their governess worked for them in Belgium but they eventually sent her home because she was a target of Belgian hostility.

When the Germans attacked Belgium in May 1940, all non-Belgian men, including Anne-Laure's father, were taken to police stations, put on trucks and sent to detention centres. The rest of the family tried to leave for Paris, where they had some relatives, but they were arrested at the train station by the Belgian police. They were imprisoned, their valuables were collected and, with a large group of German nationals, they were loaded onto cattle cars for deportation to France.

Conditions on the train were very bad. Anne remembers one woman losing her mind and another woman dying. Once, the doors of the train opened and the Red Cross threw water at them. They spent ten days on the train before arriving at the Gurs camp in France. In the camp, they were guarded by the French police. Living conditions remained poor and many inmates fell ill. They received only a slice of bread and a bowl of soup every day. The inmates established a hospital and even tried to build a post office. One day, Anne learnt that her father was being kept in the St-Cyprien camp, near Perpignan. They managed to leave their camp and reached St-Cyprien by foot and by train. They found him and stayed in a hut near the camp. Anne's mother had to sell her jewellery to survive.

Anne's father was able to escape from confinement and the family moved to Chamonix, where they stayed with relatives. Anne studied philosophy with a tutor and joined the Resistance. She helped people to hide and escorted them through the mountains to the border. During this time she met her husband Willy who was also active in the Resistance. One day, Anne got a call from a Jewish friend in Lyon warning her to leave Chamonix and to hide in the mountains in order to escape the French police who were deporting young Jewish women to Wehrmacht bordellos.

Anne and George decided to cross the Swiss border to Lausanne, where they went to the British consulate, but were refused help. The chief of the local police, a banker from Geneva who knew Anne's father, gave them an unofficial permit to stay. Some time later,

Anne's parents followed them. Anne's aunt and uncle, who had tried to cross the border, as well, were found shot in the mountains. Their jewellery had been stolen. In Switzerland, Anne attended university part-time and practised photography, helping to develop the first photos of the camps for a British secret service. Secretly, Anne worked with a Zionist group.

After the war, Anne and Willy married and returned to Belgium, where they worked with the Blue and White Brigade. Anne gave birth to a son in 1949. After some time, the family was told that since they were not Belgian citizens they would be deported to Germany, so they decided to leave the country.

In 1951, Anne and her family came to Canada with only \$60. They were sponsored by a friend's father and settled in Prescott, Ontario. Anne's parents arrived with George and his cousins. Her father died six months after arriving in Canada. They eventually moved to Montreal and Willy established a pharmaceutical business. Anne worked for the Israeli consulate and as a translator. In later years, she managed a laboratory. Her son moved to Israel to live on a kibbutz in late 1967 and fought in the Yom Kippur War. Willy died in 1987. Anne remarried in 1990 but six months later he passed away. Her son now lives in Ottawa and her two grandchildren live in Israel.