

## **RG-50.647.0014**

### **Summary of Oral Interview with Laurette L. Ankaoua**

Laurette L. Ankaoua was born April 1, 1921 in Attaf, Algeria. Her father, born in 1873, was Abraham Cuanadad and her mother, born in 1882, was Rebecca Bensoussan. Both were born in Mostaganem. Her father's brother, Elie, died in WWI, and her mother had two brothers who also fought in WWI. Laurette's maternal grandfather was from Sousse, Morocco and her paternal grandfather was from Tetuan, Morocco.

There were eleven children in her family. She went to a school in Attaf where students 5-13 years old were grouped together. There were Christians and a few Moslems in her school, mostly boys. They didn't play together much. There were the usual arguments between children, but nothing serious. After elementary school, she received a scholarship to attend the Ecole Normale in Miliana. This was a boarding school where she studied to be a teacher. There was no school for teachers in the Department of Algiers, so she had to go to Miliana. She met her husband Charlot at the age of 17 in 1939. They waited until the end of the war to get married.

In 1940 she was told to leave the school because she was the only Jew in her class of seventeen and under Pétain and the Vichy laws, Jews weren't allowed to attend her school. (**Note:** During WW II, Marshal Philippe Pétain was Chief of State in Vichy, France from 1940-1944. The Vichy regime was responsible for governing France and its colonial empire, including French Algeria.) The teacher told her they wanted a "clean France". She wasn't aware of what was going on politically because there was no access to outside information, and she wasn't allowed to have contact with her colleagues or attend classes. To continue her studies, she lived with her sister and brother-in-law and took paid private lessons so she could pass the exams for her degree. Her teachers weren't Jewish. The boys from the high school in Algiers had been evacuated and came to the girls' school, including Charlot. Jewish boys could stay there because someone from the Jewish community paid for them if they promised to pay back the money at a later date. They never did and no one asked for it. So, the Jewish boys weren't told to leave. Subsequently, her brother wrote to the Academy asking that Laurette be admitted if her father paid for her tuition. They agreed, and she was able to return and take her exams. The Americans came Nov. 8, 1942 and in March 1943 she became a teacher at Paul Robert school. Charlot was in Lybia. He returned and they got married in Orleansville. She had been there since 1944 and he came in 1945.

On Sept. 9, 1954 there was a major earthquake in Orleansville with many casualties. There was no electricity and many people died going down the stairs to escape. She had two children and used a mattress to protect them from the debris. They were able to escape, but numerous aftershocks followed. She tells an anecdote about a young shepherd who fell into a crevice and was spewed out in an aftershock. Attaf was close to the earthquake. They went to Miliana and stayed in a vacation residence her father had bought facing the public park. Her

mother had an apartment there and they stayed 3 months. They then returned to Orleansville and lived in temporary, prefab housing. She was paid her salary during this time and helped as a substitute teacher, although she didn't have to do it. They lost students and friends as a result of the earthquake. In July, 1955 Laurette and Charlot were named maître and maitresse d'application in Algiers, which meant that all the teachers had to pass through their classes.

Laurette discusses the beginning of the Algerian War in 1954 and the involvement of the FLN (**Note:** Front de Libération National= National Liberation Front directing the Algerian War against France) and OAS (**Note:** Organisation armée secrète=Secret Armed Organization that carried out attacks to stop Algerian independence from France). They lived on Rue de la Victoire across from the Casbah and could see and hear the battle of Algiers from their window, including the bullets of the FLN. She describes some of the tactics the FLN used involving kidnapped European children who were killed. She describes executions of FLN members by guillotine under DeGaulle. Women would beat on pans to alert people of an execution. The Civil prison where this occurred was across from their window. She is dismayed that a former student worked in the prison by helping to guillotine prisoners. Laurette and her family stayed until 1962.

Their children were accepted as students at the lycée, enabling Jean-Michel to take the baccalaureate exam. The FLN wanted the Arab teachers to strike, and French teachers joined them. However, Laurette refused to strike. The inspector called her in and told her to leave because it was dangerous for her to stay. She went to see the commander who lived nearby since she was afraid to get a passport in Casablanca. People who went there were being killed. She went to the passport office accompanied by soldiers for protection. However, when she came out of the building, the soldiers were gone and she was the only European in the Casbah. She saw a car drive by her and thought she would be kidnapped, so she ran to escape. The Arabs she knew liked her but others in the Casbah didn't know her and she was afraid. She went home and left immediately for France with Charlot. Their children were already there.

Initially they stayed in a hotel and then obtained rooms in a center for African students, where they stayed three months. They lived in an apartment until 1974, then moved to another apartment where they stayed for 34 years. When she came to France, she was 41 years old. Since two years working in Algeria counted as three years in France, they had an advantage and so both she and her husband retired. They accumulated five extra years credit for teaching in Algeria. Charlot obtained a position as a French teacher in an English school but Laurette couldn't get a job in the same place. She did get a job teaching with the Alliance française. She needed a non-conventional school because she was getting a pension from the government. She was told to train under a mentor for a month, but after three days her mentor verified she was ready to start right away. Laurette remained with the Alliance for 21 years while Charlot stayed with the English School of Paris. She stopped working for the Alliance in December, 1983.

Laurette Ankaoua elaborates on the period 1960-1962, including the OAS, and how they didn't like the organization because its members were fascist. Generally, teachers were left-wing

and aware of discrimination against Arabs. However, they were also against the FLN because they assassinated people. Laurette wanted to maintain her French culture, not Algerian-Arab culture, although she understood that there was discrimination against the Arabs. She left Algeria for Paris because they wanted to remain French. There was nothing for them in Algeria. They were never contacted or menaced by the OAS. Gen. Giraud was right-wing and an anti-semite who sent away Jews in the military. (**Note:** Giraud took command of French troops in N. Africa during Operation Torch). Laurette didn't know any details about Jews sent to internment camps or other camps in Tunisia and Morocco. She emphasizes that they didn't have access to information, just the radio. She describes orders from the OAS that made it hard to get food provisions.

Questioned about conditions in Algeria and the status of Jews, Laurette says she knows Moslems in France and former acquaintances from Algeria. Her relations with Moslem friends are good. In 1936, the political climate in Algeria was tense and Laurette and Charlot were politically on the left. Politics was a frequent topic of conversation. They were against Franco and for the Republicans in Spain. There were Spanish refugees in Algeria, but they were not allowed to talk to them when they were in internment camps. However, they brought them oranges. A Spanish refugee woman, Manuela, worked for them when Laurette was 15 years old, as well as an Italian prisoner who was sick. Her family helped him recuperate and in return he sewed for them. She also talks about Spanish aristocrats who, before they died, told their children they were Marranos (**Note:** Jews forced to convert to Christianity). She gives the example of a bread baker who didn't bake on Saturday because she was a Marrano Jew who secretly kept her religion. These people, however, were not part of the Jewish community. There was a rumor that Francisco Franco was a Marrano who let many Jews leave Spain. She mentions the Croix-de-feu at the time of the Front National. (**Note:** The Croix-de-feu was a nationalist organization, led by Col. Francois de La Rocque.) It was a fascist, anti-semitic organization but she claims de La Rocque wasn't an anti-semite.

There were approximately 20 Jewish and Christian families where she lived, and the rest were Moslems, so everyone knew everyone else. They didn't associate with Christians or Moslems in the village of Affreville, but they did in Attaf and Orleansville. Laurette talks about a candidate for the Croix-de-feu who, in 1946, stated on his business card that he was anti-Jewish. His wife didn't support him in this view and contacted Charlot in an effort to educate her son. She was very nice to them and sent a crystal container with fruit preserves to their house as well as many containers of roses. Laurette also talks about Constantine, Algeria when she was in boarding school, and there was no access to information. She heard stories of terrible acts there against Jews by Arabs.

Translated by: Felicia Berger Sturzer