United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Pierre Sauvage
November 19, 1990
RG-50.030*0202

PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a taped interview with Pierre Sauvage, conducted on November 19, 1990 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

PIERRE SAUVAGE
November 19, 1990

01:00:30

Q: Would you tell me your full name please?

A: My name is Pierre Sauvage.

Q: And where and when were you born?

A: I was born on March 25, 1944, near Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, France.

Q: Uh, would you tell me about your parents and how they came to be uh near Le Chambon?

A: Well, my parents, uh...

Q: Their names first.

A: My parents, Leo Sauvage and uh Barbara Sauvage--whose maiden name is [Sucholosky (ph)]--were in Paris when France fell. My mother being a Polish Jew from Bialystok; my father being a French Jew from Lorraine in eastern France. And uh they went to Marseille at the fall of France--it's [in the] south of France--and from there to Le Chambon in the fall of 1943. My mother being pregnant at the time with me, and uh that is where I had the good fortune to be born.

Q: Uh what were the circumstances, do you know, of their getting to Le Chambon? How did they reach it?

A: Uh in their case they uh heard about Le Chambon from a friend, who suggested it to my father. My father had a particularly uh hard task, because not only did he have to find a place where they would be safe--my mother being particularly vulnerable as a foreign Jew. And, of course, the French were focusing uh much of their collaborative efforts in terms of turning over Jews on the foreign Jews. So my mother was particularly vulnerable. Uh, but in addition she had a problem pregnancy; and apparently the only chance she had of bringing the baby safely into the world was if she had as much peace and quiet and food as possible, which is a bit of a tall order for Nazi-occupied Europe. Uh, and this friend uh suggested Le Chambon. He...he knew the place; and my father went there and found a room to rent, and uh went back to uh get my mother. And they came on a little steam engine train that uh brought many Jews there, as we know. And uh...uh it was uh singularly fortunate, because I'll uh...I'll also mention that uh the doctor who took care of my mother in Le Chambon was exactly for me the right doctor in the right place. Not only did he happen to be a whiz of a doctor who had trained under Albert Schweitzer in Africa, dealing with all sorts of problems and apparently had a reputation as a bit of a medical genius, but in addition he was a a committed Christian--one of the first uh of the area to be committed to non-violent resis...resistance against the Nazis--and had a special stake in my mother's situation and this baby that she wanted to bring into the world. I don't think that uh she would have gotten better medical attention if I had been born in the most modern American facility today.

Q: So you were, or your mother was, brought to this town in the apartment. Where...where...the room that your parents rented, uh from whom did they rent it?

A: They rented it from a peasant couple in a uh little hamlet which is a part of Le Chambon called La Fayolle (ph). Uh, I was known as the baby that used to wake up the neighborhood early in the morning. Uh, they uh...uh, well as I mentioned in my film, "Weapons of the Spirit," I...I...my parents didn't remain in touch, actually, with the farmers who rented that room. But I tracked them down. And the widow of the farmer who did rent the room is in my film. Uh...

Q: OK. Where...where did your parents go after that?

A: They went to uh Saint-Étienne for a year--which is not far from Le Chambon--where my father was a journalist. My father was already a journalist. He had been a journalist before the war. And then to Paris.

Q: Let's stay a minute [in] Saint-Étienne for that year. Uh, they were in Le Chambon, in the area of Le Chambon, for how long?

A: They were there from the fall of 1943 'til the end of the war. I don't know exactly when they leave, come to think of it... when they left, come to think of it. But it...I think it was around uh August of '44. Something like that.

Q: You talk, obviously, a lot about this in your film. Uh, but for the purposes of this interview, would you tell me more about the people with whom your parents came in contact, as they

told it to you? You were, of course, an infant. And did they know your parents were Jewish, and what that meant?

A: (Pause) I've got to go about it... It's complicated, because there...there are presuppositions in the question that I have to actually address. That's the uh... I was not raised with stories about Le Chambon. Uh, I was uh not raised with stories about the war, with stories about the Holocaust. I was raised by parents who wanted to put all that behind them. So, much of what I've come to know about Le Chambon--although I've since spoken quite a bit about my parents, and I've gotten certainly information that is relevant. Uh, but it's not uh...a lot of my information is really information that I got as an adult, uh talking to people.

Q: OK. Then we'll do this, as it were, at the end of the interview rather than at the beginning. And let's talk about uh... And we'll talk about Le Chambon, as such, at the end. Uh tell me where your parents went. They went to Paris, you said. Uh, what did they do there and for how long were they there?

A: Well, they were there 'til uh after the war. They were 'til 1948, when they came to New York. Uh, my father, among other things, edited a uh intellectual weekly called "[La Rue (ph)]," which was uh quite prominent, had very prestigious uh writers--uh, including uh Sartre, Camus, and Raymond [Quenot (ph)]--and people like that contributed articles to it. But uh it was a very difficult time to launch a...a publication and there were all sorts of restrictions, including paper restrictions. And uh ultimately it had to fold after about ten or twelve issues. And uh my father uh had to find work; and ultimately he decided to go to America, and went to New York where he shortly thereafter became the correspondent of

Le Figaro--a French daily--which he was for twenty-five years. Uh, [he was] also writing a number of books and also uh contributing to a number of other publications.

Q: Going back to Paris, uh by the time you left Paris or were about to leave Paris, you would be four years--or close to it.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Do you remember anything about Paris as a child?

A: Oh, I think I have a few uh memories that must go back to that time. But I'm really stunned by how much difficulty I have remembering much of my childhood; and I think that probably has a lot to do with the fact that I was raised with memory being uh bad. Uh, I was discouraged from...from remembering. I was discouraged from asking questions. And I think that's tampered with my ability to remember. And maybe that's what's given me a...a compelling need to...to document precisely, because I don't trust memory. Or maybe even to tell stories such as I do. Uh, so I remember uh startling little. In fact, the most startling thing I...I've thought about sometimes is that uh--particularly I have a two and a half year old daughter now--and...and is that I realize I was four when I came to America, and I cannot until then... Obviously, I did not speak English. And I cannot remember ever...I cannot remember the experience of having been in a foreign land and not speaking the language. I have absolutely no recollection of it. And that, to me--and...and I can't imagine that that wasn't a traumatic experience, and I cannot connect with it. I cannot remember it. And I realize that four is already not, you know, it's not a baby anymore. So uh I...I do view myself as a...as a product of a uh...of a traumatized childhood.

Q: Well, let's talk about that, and talk more about that. Uh, when you came to New York, uh what do you remember about those yearly, early years and in New York?

A: Very little.

Q: Opposed to what you were told?

01:10:45

A: Very little.

Q: Very little?

A: Very little, very little. Uh, as I get older I remember more, of course. But uh I...uh I think that the fact that uh my parents withheld from me vital information as to my identity-- as to who they were, as to why we were there, as to uh why they were who they were--uh really uh confused all my...all normal relationships with the world.

Q: Who did you believe your parents were? How did... They were in New York. You were with them. You had no memory of before. Did you believe you were Americans?

A: No. I knew that uh... No. In fact, I was raised very French. Uh, the uh...I...I now believe that part of the reason I was raised so French was that it was a way of obliterating the Jewish. Uh, I went to a French school. We spoke French at home; although I shouldn't

overstate that, because there was also my...my mother. Even though she was originally from Poland had a great love of France. By the way, she spoke French uh impeccably; and that had something to do with her survival during the war, too. She was able successfully to impersonate a Frenchwoman. I have uh come from a family with great linguistic skills. Uh, my sister later became an actress in Mexico, uh playing Mexicans on the screen, you know. And as anyone who knows about acting knows, there's nothing more difficult than that. So it's...it's like, it's funny how you see these things follow through. Uh no, but we...I didn't...I knew we weren't Americans. I knew that we were...we were uh... In fact, interestingly, uh although I wasn't uh...I didn't know I was Jewish, we...I always knew we were different. We were foreign. It's almost a way in which my parents prepared me to...to then absorb the truth. If they had been people who completely assimilated, I certainly would have been a different person. They never did. Uh, just by remaining French, by remaining different, by not even being immigrants...my parents, I...they never really identified them[selves] as immigrants. I always had the feeling in the back of my mind that one day we would go back to France. My father was a correspondent. You know, that this was not necessarily, you know, the...the final move. I never viewed them as like part of the, you know, immigrant flow into America. Uh, very strange.

Q: What about religion?

A: Uh, no religion. Uh I remember we...uh I was what might be called a "nothing." In other words, when I'd ask my parents, "What...what are we?," they'd say, "We're nothing." And then they would move on; try to, you know, dismiss...dismiss the question. Uh, not long ago my sister mentioned, by the way, that she was not the only "nothing" in her class. Uh, you know, there...there are people who...who find themselves in... in that situation. Uh, but no.

We were not...we were not Christians. I never assumed that, although it was confusing. I guess I assumed that uh... (Pause) I guess I must have assumed that we were uh, you know, originally Christian; but my father was violently anti-religious, as was my mother, in fact. And uh that meant nothing. I mean, there was nothing Christian about us. Uh we were nothing.

Q: How did it feel to be a nothing, to be of no religion and no place ?

A: Well, at the time uh I thought that was fine; or I...I thought ...I thought that was fine. Uh, I've come to feel very differently about that. But that's uh...I uh, you know, people often uh ask me--since I've mentioned the fact that I only learned I was Jewish when I was eighteen--uh, "How did it...?" And what happened is that my parents sat me down and told me. I was about to go off to Paris to study, and uh was going to be staying with a cousin of mine, uh who happens to be a survivor of Auschwitz. To compound the irony, a rather prominent gentlemen at that, Samuel [Pisar (ph)]. And uh people will sometimes say, "Well, was it a real shock?" You know, "How did you react?" And I...they're surprised that it --I don't even remember exactly how I reacted. And basically the information never really got through to me, but the facts got through to me. But when you are raised with taboos, the taboos are so internalized that you don't fully absorb the information even when it is given to you. You...your...your filtering mechanisms keep working. Not only was I in the course of...of maintaining this...this lie about who we were, part of what that entailed is that I was completely cut off from almost all of my family. Uh, it was a great...except for a few members who joined in this conspiracy of not, of keeping the secret from the children. Uh, but uh it's still stunning to me to realize that my mother had aunts and uncles in...in New York whom I never knew, because they couldn't be counted on to maintain the secret of our

being Jewish. And now as I reconnect with those family members, I still...there's a part of me that finds it very difficult to absorb their identities and their names. It's like I...I'm...I still feel this is information I'm not supposed to have, and I have to fight to to have it.

Q: When did you start... Let's keep going with this. When... when you went uh to your...your relative uh Samuel [Pisar (ph)], what was that like? Did the information become a little more internalized for you? What happened?

A: No, it really didn't. It really didn't. It took a long time. And uh I was in Paris ten years, and I had no interest in...in any of this. Uh...uh Sam at the time was uh uh...(pause) like many survivors, uh concerned with building his life; and he's an ambitious man. And focusing on...on that, uh although he would he would tell me stories. I think the...the main effect of that was he...he...he... Although he doesn't really remember it, uh he...he did tell me stories about the camps and about his experiences. And uh they had a profound effect on me. Uh but I still didn't really...I couldn't even...I'm not sure I could define what it was. I...I still... No, I didn't uh...uh I had no Jewish identity when I was in Paris. None. Uh, and no Jewish involvements. And uh...uh I...that really only started... The key influence in my life, in that respect, was my wife--whom I married uh not long after I moved to Los Angeles in 1971--who's a uh Los Angeles native, uh uh very Jewish if one can speak in those terms, and very comfortable being Jewish. And uh who worked on me for years and years and years. And uh...and then the most decisive influence of all was ultimately having children and realizing that I wanted them to have a very secure and comfortable sense of identity. And uh we uh...my wife wanted to send our son to a Reform day school, which is where he goes now and where he thrives. And uh that has had an influence on me as well.

Q: As you began to discover your own identity and who you were, did you discuss this with your parents?

01:20:00

A: Yes, we...we had uh a number of discussions uh over the years. Uh, this was a very difficult subject for my father. My father died in uh October of 1988, not long before my film on Le Chambon--"Weapons of the Spirit"--was released. Although he did see it uh before he died, and the whole process that I was involved in was a very difficult one for him and a very scary one for him. Uh, after all, he had built his whole public persona on not being Jewish. And uh...and as a journalist this was, you know, sort of a compounded irony. Not only was he a journalist, he was a good journalist; and he was also a crusader for truth and had been all his life. Uh, with this one big lie in his life. And here he had bred, as these things sometimes happen; this increasingly public Jew - not only a Jew, but somebody who was even insistent on being quite public about it. And uh I'll never forget one day uh in the early '80's, uh and I had this French film director who was visiting in L[os] A[ngeles] and we had dinner or whatever. And I talked about myself, and just coincidentally he went to New York shortly thereafter and he met my father. And uh in a phone conversation the following Sunday, my father said, "Why did you say that I..."--that my father--"was Jewish?" I thought, "What...what was he talking about?" And I said, "I...I didn't talk about...I don't even remember talking about you." And then he said, "Well, I met this director. And he mentioned..." And then I realized I had talked about myself; but talking about myself exposed my father. And I'll never forget that conversation. This was my...my dilemma, and it was in fact my dilemma in making the film - to preserve their privacy, their right to have some control over how they led their lives, which I basically believe was my obligation. At

the same time, not to allow that to cripple my own ability to lead my own life and uh pass a healthy heritage on to my children.

Q: It was quite a balancing act.

A: Yes. It was it was a very difficult balancing act. Now the film itself was very much uh... Interestingly, the film was very much negotiated with my parents. They asked me to take out certain things. Which I did; including things that I thought it was wrong to take out. Uh, I'll mention one. Uh (pause) I'll start again on that one. Uh the film was...the film was ...

Q: Let's hold it one second, if we could... (Technical Conversation) OK. Fine. Let's pick up with it.

A: The film was uh negotiated with my parents. They uh, for instance, asked me to take out certain things. My mother...in particular, my mother asked me to take out very specific things. And I remember she asked me to take out three things. And I thought about it; and I ended up...ended up taking out all three. And they hurt. And they hurt on various levels. I'll mention one, because it was interesting the sort of dilemma I was facing. Uh in the film, I initially...I...I referred to my mother losing much of her family, and I show a photograph of my mother surrounded by her family. And originally I had named all the dead relatives. And my mother asked me to take out the names. And I really thought that was, I mean, the greatest honor I could do to these people was to name them, to give them that identity--my grandmother, Feige Sucholosky. But I just decided, in that instance, that uh my respect for my mother would take precedence. And I did. I took out the names.

Q: Since this is not a commercial film but will be a scholarly film, would you like to tell us the names of your mother's relatives who died, to preserve their memory?

A: Well, the...the...the...the...the key ones that uh that I allude to are my grandmother, Feige Sucholosky, my uh... (Pause) You know, it's...it's amazing. I really don't normally freeze in any sort of interview situation, and I've done it a number of them. And I realize it's absolutely no coincidence that even though I have gone over those names so often, that there's a part of me that like shuts off because I'm...I'm not supposed to...to do it in some way. Uh but yes, my...my uncle, Memel (ph) Sucholosky; my mother's sister... How can I, how can I not, how can I freeze on her...on her name?

Q: It's OK.

A: Amazing.

Q: It's OK. You have been trained since childhood not to remember.

A: Yes. Amazing how effective uh those things are.

Q: Let's go on.

A: Uh huh.

Q: We can come back to this later. Uh, can you tell me... You've talked a good bit about the relations with your family. I have one more question about your parents, and then we'll leave that phase. Have you managed through all this to remain close to your parents, or has it separated you in some way?

A: There were tense moments with my father, as I was developing into a person different from what he had anticipated. Uh my father ended up liking the film quite a bit, which is really in a...in a way the strongest endorsement of the film I ever had. Because with his mind-set, uh for him to say that the film was, you know, basically correct, I thought, "My God, it really must be pretty...pretty correct." Uh, he used to argue, though, that uh the film--and he's the only person who's ever said this to me, which is sort of funny. But he always argued that the film would have been better if I had left myself completely out of it. Uh, but uh hard to say. We ...we never broke relations ever. We would have regular Sunday conversations. Uh, I don't... Let me put it this way. I hope that I will have a closer relationship with my own children than I had with my parents. I think that uh people are punished for their sins. I think the way they raised me was wrong. And I think it impaired our ability to bond.

Q: Let's go back a little bit. I think that should sit a bit. And go back to a young man growing up in New York. Uh, along the way--uh, again, for the record--I'd like to know a little bit more about the kind of schooling you had in New York, and what you did as a young man. What was your family life like? Let's start with school and friends. It's easier.

A: I'll tell you, the most striking thing about...about my childhood friends is that I realized a few years ago that of my closest friends when I was a young child, uh a high percentage uh were if not children of Holocaust survivors-- although there were...there were...there were

some... In fact, my closest friend for a number of years was. Uh, at least uh related [to the Holocaust] in the sense that some of them, their parents had come like in the '30's. And often those people don't identify as survivors, because they came earlier, even though they still lost a lot of their relatives. And often the effects are not efficiently...uh, sufficiently acknowledged as still being Holocaust-related effects. Certainly, in terms of the children. Children almost never identify as children of Holocaust survivors, if their parents came in the mid-'30's. Although often they have a lot more in common with children of survivors than they realize. And this ...this is all the more striking since I didn't...not only did I not know I was the parents...the child...the child of Holocaust survivors, I didn't even know I was Jewish. So it's funny that it was with these people that the relationships uh developed. But I...I think that's just a measure of the inescapable commonalities that...that were there even though the labels, you know, weren't there. It wasn't relationships based on labels. It was relationships based on, uh I guess, similar attitudes or similar things in common. Uh, I identify very strongly with uh second generation children of survivors. I have been intermittently active in such groups. Uh I think uh I have learned a lot from uh other children of survivors, even though my parents' case was different in many respects. And, of course, I use "survivor"--"Holocaust survivor"--in the broadest sense, which encompasses people who weren't in... My parents were never in camps. But they were in hiding, they were in fear, they lost family. And I find that they...the result of those...those times have uh set in motion a certain number of things that uh we children of survivors have in common.

Q: Such as...?

01:32:00

A: Uh, well, some strengths, some weaknesses. And uh I think uh what I am most insistent on--in fact, I've been quite incendiary about it at times--is that uh we need to find our own way towards those memories, our own paths, uh fully respectful of the experience of our parents. Uh, needing to learn from it, needing to hear them, needing to hear that testimony as much as everybo...everybody needs to hear that testimony; but at the same time, not to be...feel dwarfed by it, to acknowledge our own childhood hurts, to realize that in some respects uh we have been victims of the Holocaust in our own right, victims of the effect of the Holocaust through our parents, and uh sometimes our parents have not been able to acknowledge. This was too painful to them, that such hurts occurred; and that often they--unwillingly, unwittingly, simply because they went through the experience that they went through--were the cause of some of this...this pain. Children of survivors need to acknowledge that pain, need to acknowledge that need to...to form their own identities. Uh and that does involve, if they're interested in psychology, I I believe nothing is more important than to be able to get in touch with your...your childhood pains and acknowledge its existence and identify it. And that is the only way it will not be passed on to your own children.

Q: In doing that, in attempting to reach yourself, as it were, you have, among other things, chosen to become a Jew. How did you actually... You talked about your wife. But how...how does...how did that process develop, and how has that interact[ed] with your parents?

A: The question of my Jewish identity is such an...my Jewish identity is such an evolving one that it really changes; not only from year to year, but probably from month to month. And I have no idea what exactly that identity will be uh five years from now. Whether it will be a

very pronounced one, or whether I will decide enough of this and this really doesn't matter to me that much. I...I really don't...I really don't know. I know that uh I felt a need to have an identity, that the only identity that it made sense for me to have was the identity of my ancestors. Uh, and that I have indeed become increasingly comfortable with it, that I realize that a lot of who I am is indeed uh wrapped up in...in Judaism and uh its influences on my family. You know, the influence...the influences exist whether they're identified or not. The fact that my parents uh never acknowledged being Jewish doesn't mean they weren't, in very fundamental ways, very Jewish. Uh, and uh and that influence was probably there. Uh, but uh... (Pause) You know, it's interesting how these things work. I think the people of Le Chambon made me more Jewish. They... First of all, I came to believe that at bottom, when you've cut through all the specifics of why they did what they did or all the conjecture--one can do all the factors that come into this--uh at bottom everything flowed from their own inescapable sense of their own identity. Their own sense of comfort at being who they were, at having no questions about who they were. And everything flowed, almost inescapably, incredibly naturally and very spontaneously, from that. That sense of identity. And if one derived strength from that, that rootedness, uh well then I had to try to aspire--particularly as a parent, and wanting to be able to raise strong children--had to aspire to a similar rootedness and had to find my roots. And my roots were in being a Jew, so that was the only way to go. In addition, when I was making "Weapons of the Spirit," I realized that the way in which the film would be most effective would be if it was a Jewish film in praise of a group of Christians. It couldn't be a...a neutered film...wouldn't go anywhere. And that forced me to ...to absorb and understand as much as I could, to...to really be as Jewish as I could be in the making of that film. But that it's...it had to mirror, in a way, the...the reunion that took place in Le Chambon between Jews and Christians, that it had to emb...embody it. As best as I could, as ignorant as I am still about so much of Judaism, it had to be uh Jewish.

And I'm very touched, by the way, when uh orthodox Jews are responsive to the film, as indeed the few who have spoken to me have been. Uh, that means a lot to me.

Q: How do your parents react to your being Jewish, openly and publicly Jewish?

A: My father was very uncomfortable with it. My mother, particularly since my father passed away, has uh really jettisoned a lot of the past taboos. In fact, she's probably made changes faster than I've been able to accept her changes. Uh, that often happens that way. Uh, I'm almost locked into my image of her; and she probably is far readier to change than than I am ready to accept her changes. So she really, I I must say, now is...is...seems to be quite comfortable with all of this uh...and uh loves the film. Has a tape of it which she looks at periodically, and uh very, very supportive and uh uh uh...and uh apparently quite comfortable with all of it.

Q: You had mentioned... And now let's move more to the film itself. Uh, you had mentioned that there were three segments that you had left out. You had described one. Can you describe the other two?

A: It's funny. Somebody asked me that a while back. And I...I was afraid when I mentioned that that you were going to ask me that question, because uh I tried to remember what the three were the other day and I couldn't. I remembered two of them, and I was missing a third. I...I know I'm going to be able to to... One was the names of the...of my dead relatives. The other one was the uh place they were from--Bialystok, Poland. Uh, the original narration said my mother's family in...in Bialystok; and...and...and I took out

Bialystok because I was asked to. And it's the third request that, at this point, I cannot remember.

Q: Uh, let's talk a bit now about the making of...of "Weapons of the Spirit." What kind...when you started to...to uh do the personal interviews, can you tell me something about the people who...who would have been the most important? Uh, certainly to your parents, even if they didn't want to talk about it. Uh, for instance, uh Magda Trocmé, who comes across in the film as this wonderfully determined woman.

A: She's an extraordinary woman.

Q: Can you describe your relationship with her, and what she is like now, in her old age?

01:42:00

A: It's funny. I'm just moved thinking about Magda. I love her. I love her. Uh, she is an extraordinary woman, extraordinary woman. Uh... (Pause) If I may, I'm...I'm tempted to...to interject real quickly that we really live in a sexist society, uh one form of which is to discount often the...the female influence. You know, when it comes to rescue in particular, when it comes to rescuers, uh I'm convinced that women played a far more important role than men. It was often the woman who would be literally at the door if somebody knocked on it. It was in...often into it in the mother's home, you know. When the story of Le Chambon is told, you know, one tends to focus--when...when it's talking about leadership--on Pastor Trocmé, who was an extraordinary figure whom I...I...I admire inordinately. A brilliant, brilliant man. Uh, but really, that...that combination of Pastor Trocmé and Magda

Trocmé was an extraordinary combination. She is the most direct, uh efficient, uh focused person I have ever known. Uh, she uh... (Pause) She cuts through to things. Uh, im...immediately. She is an extraordinary, extraordinary, extraordinarily practical person. Uh, she really... You know, Trocmé--Pastor Trocmé--was a...a thinker. Uh, some of that thinking ended up producing tremendous results; and he would...he did things. But uh Magda Trocmé is truly a...a doer. You know, "What do you need now? What has to be done now?" You know, "How are you going to solve that problem?" It...it... All practical. And uh I...I...I really sort of absorbed from her the sense in which that is what is most important in any given situation, in any situation of crisis. Don't make a big deal about it. Just, you know, figure out, you know, what needs to be done and do it.

Q: And that came through in the film.

A: She is...she is a...a uh...she is a...a extraordinary woman.

Q: In the film, one of the things that you do is to develop an understanding that events took place not only in Le Chambon but in all the surrounding hamlets.

A: Yes.

Q: Can you talk about some of the people that you interviewed uh in those hamlets that did some rather special things?

A: You know it's a very important point, a very important point. And I'm particularly interested in addressing it, even for history; because, in a way, I may be culpable of having uh

obscured things even in...in the film. You know, films are not footnoted. Uh, they...they have to be somewhat linear - the form has certain requirements. And to be sure, Le Chambon was the centerpiece of what occurred. It was where Pastor Trocmé and Assistant Pastor [Édouard] Theis and Magda Trocmé were at the heart of what did occur. Uh, and the railway station was in Le Chambon. But really what...when it's talking about ...and you talk to Jews who were in the area, they are talking about the area. They are talking about "Le Plateau"[1]. They are talking about all the surrounding hamlets, and indeed some of the neighboring villages. Uh, what happened is symbols get created, and Le Chambon is the symbol. Le Chambon inescapably will be the symbol. But I hope that soon enough we will be able, having absorbed the symbol--the symbol having become sufficiently familiar to us--we will then be able to realize and acknowledge that it is merely a symbol. And, in fact, it's a symbol for the area. And in Le Chambon itself, there is very much that concern. Le Chambon itself doesn't want it to appear that it is trumpeting itself in any way, particularly Le Chambon versus Le Mazet or versus Fay. You know, there were pastors in all those areas who were actively involved in what went on. Uh, and for posterity it is certainly, it is crucially important that that point be made. In fact, it amazes me the point is made in the film... You know, it...it...it...I thought it was made quite strongly in the film, about that surrounding area was involved. And it almost amazed me how uh every reviewer ignores that and says Le Chambon, and talks, you know. And I say five thousand Christians in the area, but it it often becomes the five thousand villagers of Le Chambon. People have great difficulty focusing on what, to them, are details. Uh, but certainly for history [it] is important to...to underscore. Yes, it was...it was the area.

[1]The area surrounding Le Chambon.

Q: Do you remember individuals? Your camera does, but what I would like is, can you talk about one or two individuals in different towns, for this purpose?

A: Well, I met people from...from all over the area. I don't...I don't really think of them in terms of uh... I...I mainly...I found no differences, you know. The people in...in Le Mazet, uh which is the sister village to...to Le Chambon... Uh, which by the way, Le Mazet was even more densely Protestant than Le Chambon, if that is possible. Uh, Le Chambon may have had...I don't know, maybe roughly ten percent of Catholics. I don't know if that figure is exactly accurate. Uh, Le Mazet was almost, I pre...I imagine ninety-nine percent, you know, Protestant. And there were Jews hidden throughout uh Le Mazet. Uh, but when I think of individuals, it's hard for me to...to think of in...in particular places. I...I really think of some of the people... Well, probably, the people in Le Chambon that I probably feel closest to, besides uh...besides the Trocmé family, uh are uh Henri et Anne Heritier (ph), who play a very imp...very important role in the film, uh who open and close the film, but who...who also... And played a very important role in the life of the village, uh although nobody knew it at the time; because they were harboring the young Jew who was the forger for the village. And that was a key component in what went on there. People--Jews--needed false...false ID's. Uh, but they played an important role in my life, because my parents had a very surprisingly close relationship with Heritiers. They did not have a close relationship with the peasants with whom they were staying. Uh, and didn't...maintained no contact with ...with them. Whereas the Heritiers, they did maintain a contact. When I went back to Le Chambon in the '60's with my parents, which I did, uh we visited the Heritiers and uh said hello to them. And my...my parents always thought the Heritiers were the the salt of the earth. They always felt that way about them. And uh...and the Heritiers's daughter, as I mentioned in the film, Eva uh had taken care of me as a baby. And uh I am

convinced, by the way, now more and more as I uh pursue my interests in psychology and...and realize the extent to which we are shaped...shaped by early influences, uh that uh in...in...on some deep level, I was probably uh very much influenced by the Heritiers as a baby and as an infant. Uh I was actually uh left with the Heritiers for a certain period of time when my parents were busy. And Eva, when my parents were in Saint-Étienne--a near-by town--they...Eva took me back to Le Chambon. And I stayed with her and her parents, you know, for a period of time. In the film, Madame Heritier...

(TECHNICAL CONVERSATION)

01:52:30

Q: OK. You were saying that you had been left with them for significant periods of time while your parents were working in Saint-Étienne.

A: That's right. That's right. I was actually uh... Eva Heritier, who was the Heritiers' daughter, who was uh...went with my parents when they went to Saint-Étienne. My mother asked to take Eva with her to help her out, which was a big deal for the Heritiers. Their daughter going to the big city. And they trusted. It's an interesting symbolism of that actually, because they...they trusted my parents to take their daughter away with them to...to the big city. Trust ends up going both ways. Uh, but at one point, Eva took me back to... to Le Chambon. Uh, just her alone. And I stayed with her parents and with her. And in "Weapons of the Spirit," Madame Heritier mentions the fact that that's where I learned to walk. Apparently, my first steps were taken under their auspices. And, you know, it was very moving to me when she ...she mentioned that. I...I...I don't know. I...I can't help

wondering whether there isn't something faintly symbolic about that, that somehow uh... Well, that's where I started to walk.

Q: I suspect there's something symbolic, indeed. Uh, you just said something very interesting. You said that in the 1960's you went back with your parents.

A: Yes.

Q: But your parents had raised you...

A: Right.

Q: ...uh not to be a Jew, and not to know your background.

A: Yes.

Q: Tell me how that visit in the '60's came about, and what your parents told you.

A: That visit was a part of my uh period in the desert, so to speak, uh where I...I was a traumatized young man who didn't know anything. So that is...it's enshrouded in the same sort of uh mystery that much of my early life is. I...I...and I remember very little about it. All I knew was that we were going back to the uh town where my parents happened to be. I didn't know why they were there. I didn't ask. I had been taught not to ask questions. I was a very good, dutiful child, who didn't ask questions. Uh, and uh I was brought to the

hospital where my...I was born. And we visited the Heritiers, and uh... But none of this had any context, and uh really influenced me; except that it may have without my realizing it.

Q: How old were at that time?

A: I'm not sure of the exact date. I think it was probably around '65, '66. So I was twenty uh...twenty-one, twenty-two.

Q: And your parents never told you more than that you were going to visit a place they had been...

A: No. In...

Q: Not that people rescued them, or none of that?

A: No. Of course, interestingly, uh it shows how taboos linger on long after they've been ostensibly lifted. This was a time when I already knew I was Jewish and they were Jewish. But it was nevertheless a time when I still didn't push, didn't... My parents, probably at that time they...they had imparted the information, but they didn't want it to matter to me. They still didn't want me to ask questions. They still didn't want to... So I...I...I still never asked questions. Uh, "How did you survive? Where...?" You know. And uh, you know, I didn't uh...and I didn't realize the...the extent of what had happened in...in Le Chambon there. So uh I...I really don't remember that...that visit very well. Uh, I remember...I remember so much better, and I will share with you, uh a visit uh...the first visit that I made to the Heritiers uh as I was uh emerging from my taboos and was uh... I went with my wife in in

the early '80's, and we knocked on the door. You know, in a small village you don't always call ahead. You know, you just drop by. And we did. And I introduced Barbara, my wife, to...to the Heritiers. And uh Madame Heritier immediately left and went into another room, and came back with this beautiful framed photograph of me as a baby. And it's something I will never remember. It was so touching that she had that photograph, and that she knew immediately, you know, where it was. That it had been in some very accessible place that she could bring it out so quickly. And uh uh...I uh...I do feel a very, very, very special bond with...with those people and with that community. Free association here, but I...I just thought of. I've never mentioned this, really. But a line that will be forever with me which was so typically Chambonais, in a way. Another wonderful woman who was in the film was Madame Bareau (ph), who was a very old woman even then when I interviewed her. And uh in fact, the problem I had as the filmmaker was pinning her down and to sit for the interview, because she was always running around. And as she would describe it, she was always running around visiting the old people. Uh, and she being uh already 89. Uh, but I remember I had borrowed all her...her photographs; and all these people entrusted me with all their photographs, and even their childhood photographs. Which is ... They really trusted me. And I remember...I'll never forget uh going to her house to return her photographs, and she opened the door. And I was thanking her, and she was anxious to say something to me. And uh she interrupted me, and she said, "You know, I was talking to Madame Caritienne (ph)..."--another person. And she said, "I just wanted you to know that we both agreed it would have been a shame if you hadn't been born."--"S'aurait domage que vous ne soyez né." And I've thought about line so often. It...it's so typically Chambonais, in a way. Because, of course, it would be a shame if...if anybody wasn't born. But it was both very, very personal and very, very broad. I still don't even know what the line means. All I know is uh it sparked me, it's part of me.

Q: What would you like to add for the purposes of this film we have done ?

02:00:30

A: Well, I'd like to say something about righteous Christians, such as the people of Le Chambon, to which I am increasingly devoting part of my life. And perhaps particularly this: as we come to attach more importance to them, and we are doing that, we must not fall into a trap. The old trap used to be to dismiss them, to ignore them, to consider that all this was so uh...they were so few in number that they're not important. Because they were few in number. And, of course, they were few in number. But that's precisely what makes them important. Uh, and that somehow focusing on them will whitewash that period, that somehow it will make...give the world an excuse to feel better about itself. Well, that's not the way it works. On the contrary, they make us accountable. They prove that it was possible to care. And that is what is necessary. If we hand on only a memory of...of...of bitterness and hopelessness, then the world is off the hook. If the world ends up thinking that it is not possible to combat evil, that it is not possible to stand up, then...then it's off the hook. Then it's not possible to do anything. So that that...all those things we will quickly come to understand. But the...the...the trap is that we not, in focusing on them, start idealizing them. That we not put them on pedestals. That we not make heros of them. Of course, they appear to us unusual because they weren't many and there's something inescapably moving about them. But it is crucial that we take their word for it, that what they did came naturally to them. It was normal. It was no big deal. That these people are no different from us. That what they did is...we are capable of doing. Uh, that uh they acted out of emotions and attitudes that were not heroic, larger than life uh...you know, emotions;

but just very small normal emotions. Uh, there were...there were hero-types also during the Holocaust. There were people like Raoul Wallenberg or Andre Trocmé. These were people who had a...a compelling need to make their mark, to...to... These were heros. Most rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust were not that sort. They were very ordinary people, who simply responded appropriately to the challenge that they faced. And they are the most relevant to us. Very few of us are going to be Raoul Wallenbergs. All of us, every day, are faced with choices that involve recognizing that there is a need to help, uh a need not to turn away, a need to realize that we are responsible for something that is going on around us. That we can influence positively. And we need to know--in a way, in the most selfish...for the most selfish reasons--that responding to that need will make us feel good, will make us feel uh peaceful, happy, uh will prolong our lives. Uh to care about other people is fundamentally to care about yourself. And that is part of what I hope uh people will derive from contact with...through museums, through books, through films, will derive from learning about the righteous gentiles of the Holocaust. And the righteous Jews of the Holocaust. Because they existed, too.

Q: Thank you.

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

Q: OK. One of the questions I'd like to ask is...does concern making "Weapons of the Spirit." Uh, can you tell us why you made it? How you came about to make it?

A: I think it is no coincidence that somebody who was raised to forget ended up making a documentary record of what happened in Le Chambon. I think that uh maybe people who

are raised with stories all their lives sometimes take them for granted. Uh, people who trust their memory often have maybe less of a need to document. Because I have such a precarious memory, because it's such a challenge for me to...to...to remember things, I only feel secure if it's in some way recorded. To me, it only exists when it's recorded. And uh I think that may have been a big part of this compulsive need to document uh the story of Le Chambon and--forgive me for saying so, but--to really document it as accurately as I possibly could. You cannot footnote a film, but I love history. Uh, I love academic research. I...I really wanted this to be as uh accurate as it possibly could be; bearing in mind that any film has to have a dramatic flow, even a documentary. So, you know, you...you tell; but at the same time--and that was part of the reason that it took so long and was such a challenge, in terms of putting it together--to both respect the history, respect all the details, have every detail right, and yet not have it be boring. Which was my primary obligation as a filmmaker. It had to...the film had to work. I think that uh my traumatized upbringing probably had a lot to do with my need to tell the story, and probably had a lot to do...certainly had a lot to do with the effect that the people of Le Chambon had on me. Uh, you know, the amazing thing to me, as I've come to reflect on this a little bit, about the influence of the story of Le Chambon on my life is that it really uh...it happened twice. It happened at my birth; but it happened when I was an adult and I came back there and met these people again, and was so heavily influenced by them that it really changed my life. And I really feel that they rescued me twice. And perhaps it is that second form of rescue--the rescue of me as a lost, rootless, depressed adult--that gives "Weapons of the Spirit" something of a universal message. Because I do believe that many of us, even though my case may have been exteme, that many of us do have a need for positive stories to hold on to. Legitimate, real realistic sources of hope. And that I had that need. And... and the film--

the making of the film and the film itself--responded to that need. And maybe that it's how to give the story whatever universal ramifications it may have.

Q: Ok. OK. Thank you very much. Yeah, that does it. Ok, that's it. Thanks. No, that's good. That's good. That's the one question I forgot.

02:10:45

A: Good.

Conclusion of Interview.