

Biography of Nelly Trocmé Hewett for the Lieu de Mémoire, Le Chambon-sur-Lignon



Nelly Trocmé Hewett was born in 1927 and arrived in Le Chambon-sur-Lignon in 1934 with her parents, Pastor André Trocmé and wife Magda, and her three younger brothers— Jean Pierre, Jacques and Daniel.

She attended the village elementary school and then the Ecole Nouvelle Cévenole. An adolescent during WWII, Nelly clearly remembers the influx of refugees onto the Plateau Vivarais-Lignon. Considering the events taking place across Western Europe and the shortages endured by all, the young people of Le Chambon and neighboring communities led a relatively normal life, in large part because they were geographically isolated. There was no active occupation by the Germans in this remote corner of the northeastern Massif Central region — 40 miles separated them from the nearest German headquarters.

The people of the plateau *did* experience a number of frightening and tragic events, however. In 1943 there was the arrest of Daniel Trocmé, André Trocmé's cousin who was director of a young adult residence called La Maison des Roches, and 18 of the refugees who lived there. Daniel died in the Majdanek concentration camp. A few of the residents survived, but most of them died or disappeared. There was also the 1944 Massacre of Saint-Genis-Laval, where the village doctor, Roger LeForestier, lost his life. The massacre was ordered by the Butcher of Lyon, Klaus Barbie.

Nelly left France for the United States in 1947, after passing two state baccalaureate exams. She worked for a year as an "au pair, then earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana, in 1949.

In 1951 Nelly married American Henry Blackburn. They settled in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on the banks of the great Mississippi River, where Dr. Blackburn launched his research career in cardiology and epidemiology and they raised three children. Nelly taught high school French for 25 years, a job she very much enjoyed. They lost their eldest child, John, to illness in 1980.

Nelly married Hobart "Mac" Hewett, a Honeywell engineer, in 1985. Widowed in 2006, she continues to live independently in St. Paul, Minnesota, on the opposite bank of the Mississippi. She is surrounded by friends and her daughter Heidi's family. Her other daughter, Katia, lives in Seattle, Washington. Her one surviving brother, Jacques, lives with his family near Perpignan, France.

Nelly has kept up with former refugees and numerous wartime friends, and has met regularly with them in Le Chambon during their traditional August vacations. Her most recent trip was in 2014. She remains deeply connected to the WWII history of Le Plateau Vivarais-Lignon, and has many wonderful memories of her parents and her youth. For her, "going home" means returning to Le Chambon-sur-Lignon.

Nelly praises the Lieu de Mémoire for its sober elegance and for the honesty and precision with which it tells the story of all of the residents of the plateau during the war. She says: "This museum will allow new generations of visitors to learn an important story of human beings at their fundamental best. Even in times of strife, human beings are capable of accomplishing great things."