

Interview prep with Andrea Klein - Feb 23, 2018

Questions for interview

Good day Mrs, my name is Wanda...Wanda Potrykus...may I call you Andrea?

Just to recap and to make sure we both have the same understanding that we are recording this interview in English for use in the Atwater Library 2017-18 Oral History project currently in progress...the participants of which are interviewing Montrealese islanders, former and current residents and workers as well as those just passing through and we are asking for stories about the area surrounding the Atwater Library including downtown Montreal and Westmount, Saint Henri, Little Burgundy, Verdun.

Your own story is of great interest because of your life experiences, your career choices, the fact you always seemed to pursue your dreams and although much of your life took you away from the area under study you ended up living here 14 years ago although your husband had his office in this area for quite a number of years before that. And now you live on Kensington street in Westmount

For reasons of clarity, as far as this recording goes, our paths crossed a year or so ago as you came to volunteer as a resident representative on the Community Events Advisory Committee known by its acronym CEAC that's appointed by Westmount City Council to advise on cultural and community events, which is where we met. Your story first intrigued me since you made me smile by telling me you come from a relatively weird family. But hearing about it, I don't think that label is one I would have used...but that's me...since I come from a weird family of my own...so I guess that makes me a good judge but that's a story for another time. I wonder if you would start at the beginning and tell me about your family.

Notes recorded from phone conversation and emails exchanges between Andrea and Wanda:

I am a first generation Canadian with roots in both Belgium and France. My Belgian grandfather, who was involved in many businesses throughout Europe, learned to speak 8 languages. Interestingly enough, the wealth accumulated at that time allowed his children to attend an elite Lycee. My father actually had prince Leopold, later king Leopold III of Belgium, as his classmate.

However. WWI changed much of that and subsequently in 1926 my father emigrated to Canada where he met and married my mother.

French is actually my mother tongue, but strangely enough I do not recall being traumatized when, unable to speak English, I attended an English school. I have learned since then that language is only a means of communication. What I did find difficult was the fact that both my

brother and I were never really accepted by either the Anglophones or the Francophones. Many physical fights ensued and I even remember having stones thrown at us because we were different. Fortunately we lived in a multicultural community, and without really understanding anything about religion, somehow a few Jewish kids became my only friends. My parents were very accepting of various ethnic groups and my father, as his father before him, would speak to strangers they deemed interesting. That is how my father met the artist Emily Carr who was taken up by his friendly attitude and gave him one of her watercolours, This is now part of my possessions.

After high school I enrolled part time at Sir George William's College while working at a pharmaceutical firm. Although I obtained a BSc. and became a chemist, I felt unfulfilled and moved to New York City to pursue the arts. Again I worked in a pharmaceutical firm while attending The New York School of Interior Design. Somehow things changed and instead I obtained my Mrs degree! Upon my return to Montreal I continued at NYSfD through correspondence. After my son was born I started my own interior design business and continued until my recent retirement from the field..

Unfortunately things changed again and I negated the Mrs. degree (got a divorce). Always searching and wanting to know more about the arts, back to university I went, but this time in the Fine Arts department. Those were the best years of my life. Through a fluke I even got involved in archeology and was hooked. I graduated with a major in History of Art and Architecture and a minor in Biblical Archaeology.

For the past 14 years I have lived in Westmount with my late husband who was born and brought up in Westmount. He often mentioned an interesting little anecdote about Christopher Plummer, a Montreal High School classmate.

Hope I gave you enough material. You made me look back at my life and now my head is spinning thinking of my rich background and all the wonderful memories I have of my family.

Thanks Wanda

Looking forward to tomorrow.

Fondly,

Andrea