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**Jacques Riousse: Data on his life**

Written 5-11 October 1992 on the basis of interviews and revised 9.2.2024 by Ludwig Spätling

17. 3. 1911 Jacques Riousse (JR) born in Neuilly sur Seine (Hauts de Seine, Paris)

Father: Paul Riousse, born 27 March 1877 in Tours, trained as a notary and banker, initially employed, later self-employed; had a small bank (Riousse) in Rambouillet, where they also lived. He was wounded in 1916. A gas attack damaged his lungs and he suffered frostbite to his legs. He spent two years in a military hospital in Berck, in the north of France on the Atlantic between Boulon and Fort Mahon

Mother: Margueritte, maiden name Bit, born 1880 in Paris

Marriage February 1903

1st brother: Maurice, born in September 1906

2nd brother: Michel, born 20 February 1915

1914

Father is called up for military service; brother Maurice and he move with their mother to Angers to live with their aunt Marie-Louise, wife of Dr Mederic Caillaud (general practitioner)

JR's first impressions: the carriage that had picked them up from the railway station stops in front of the house in Angers, he gets out.

1915

The father had not seen the family for a year; Michel had been born in the meantime.

JR's impression: A man (father) had come, he had a big beard. This strange man hugged him, but this made no impression on him at all. He remembers the red moon, which his father said was a sign of blood.

Holidays in Les-Pont-des-CÇ, living in a historic house from the 15th century

1916

Holidays in Bouche-Maine

October Enrolment: "Externat" St Maurille, Angers.

The older brother already went to this school.

About the school system: They started in the "Onzième" and had one class less each year. The school was run by nuns in civilian clothes.

1918

After the peace treaty (armistice), his mother returned to Paris with Michel. He himself stayed in Angers until the end of the school year.

4.10. 1919

Change of school: College de Jeuilly, in the Septième; an old Benedictine abbey where many famous people had already gone; he really wanted to go to this school because it had a swimming pool.

Father had returned from the war, or rather from Berck au Plage, where the military hospital was located.

1920/21

Sixième, First Communion

1921/22

Cinqième

1922/23

Quatrième

1923/24

Tresième

1924/25

Second

Holidays in La Panne, Belgium, a town on the Atlantic.

There he painted several small watercolours, for the first time consciously breaking the rule he had been taught at school about drawing/painting: first make a plan and only then paint.

The thought of possibly becoming a priest came to him at this point. He was sitting in a practice room next to someone who was preparing for the Baccalauréat (Bac) in philosophy. There was a book on the desk, the "Pensées de Pascal". In contrast to what he had previously tried to read in the context of philosophy, he was able to understand this one.

He was fascinated by the "relativity" in his world view, and in this context he asked himself to whom he should dedicate his life.

1925/26

Première, which concludes with the first part of the Bac

Holidays near Berck: Fort-Mahon/Plage

1926/27

Holidays, Fort-Mahon/Plage

1927/28

Holidays, Brittany, Perros Guirec

These were the last holidays with her father before his death.

That summer, he passed the Mathélém and Philo exams. The collège only wanted to admit him to the Mathélém. He therefore went to another school to prepare for the Philo. There he prepared for another month and then passed both exams.

19.2.1929

Father died

The family never talked about money, so they never knew whether they were rich or poor. They were more likely to have been poor. The pension was probably also very small. At this point, the question of the direction of his future life became increasingly important. As he had to complete his military service, he initially considered the navy, as he loved sailing. That is why he initially enrolled at a preparatory school for the Ecole navale. However, as his father had died, he had to earn money. This is where journalism appealed to him.

The atmosphere initially appealed to him. He recounts an encounter with someone who wanted to recruit him. This man was probably gay or a pederast.

After several months of journalism, he contracted scarlet fever and was therefore quarantined for 40 days at home, Rue Erlanger, near Place Auteuille. During this period of rest, he decided not to continue with journalism.

An uncle was an architect and introduced him to a central heating engineer who hired him as a draughtsman.

Here he worked for a year in the office and also outside on measurements. Naturally, he learnt a lot for his later work, especially with regard to the design of later projects. (One can think here of the expansion of the studio and the construction of the "Bonnelles").

1930/31

His mother falls ill with bone tuberculosis.

Although he was doing the work of an engineer that his patron was saving, he did not get the pay rise he had asked for, which made him look for another job. The journey to work was also long. He found a job with a company that carried out the electrification of residential buildings. He worked there for a year as a secretary.

3/1931-3/32 Hagenau/Elsas

Military service could no longer be postponed. He also wanted to get it over with. So he ended up near Strasbourg. As he loved working with horses and being close to nature, he decided to join a unit that distributed fresh horses to the individual units. He was recommended as an officer. During the entrance examination, however, he included a joke in a written assignment about the meaning of "baron", which is why he received a poor grade and therefore did not have to become an officer. So he served as a non-commissioned officer. He worked in a captain's office as well as riding horses.

4/1932

Return to Paris; in the meantime, his mother had been sent to a sanatorium in Berck because of bone tuberculosis;

Michel had started school in Auteuille. They were living in Rue de Printemps at the time.

Friends suggested that he join the diplomatic service. He took a few courses, e.g. in law. He probably took part in the entrance examination, but had no chance.

During this time, he also considered becoming a pilot. However, the training would have taken another five years.

However, the whole affair was somewhat patriotically coloured for him. He had almost signed the papers, but as he was still a minor, he had to get his mother to sign them, but she didn't want to sign her son's "death warrant". Even in peacetime, plenty of planes had fallen from the sky, which of course you never heard anything about from the official side. That's why he didn't pursue it any further.

He also had to think about providing for his family, as there was no social insurance.

(His uncle, his mother's brother, had a company in Paris that made borders or something similar. What this meant for his life is not entirely clear).

The household in Angers had also been dissolved, uncle and aunt had died.

7/1932

Bac from Michel

10/1932

Started working as a teacher in St Martin de Pontoise with the subjects: Maths (5ième) and science (6ième).

He had no idea about the latter, but still believed he was a good teacher as he learnt everything at the same time as his pupils.

Teachers at public schools did not have to have a degree at that time; only at public schools was a degree compulsory.

1932/33

continue in St Martin de Pontoise

The brothers now considered what to do, especially with regard to their mother. She was still in a sanatorium in Berck at the time.

They rented a flat in the north of Paris near a hill (?).

1933/34

Michel now also comes to St Martin de Pontoise. He is employed as a supervisor, as he did not yet have the relevant qualification.

In the course of 1933, a flat is rented for the mother in Pontoise so that she is close by.

He finds the situation there scandalous: children of rich parents are favoured for admission. The style of the Oxford schools is imitated to a certain extent. This also prompted him to change schools.

1934/35

Transfer to l'ecole providence in Amiens, a Jesuit school. He and his brother taught there for four years. The brothers also chose this school because it was not too far away from Berck. In addition to school, both brothers were also active in the Scouts.

Michel works on preparing for the Licence de lettre, which he also receives in 1938.

Tours were organised during the holidays, especially with the scouts. He travelled to Germany by bike in 1936. There he met girls, some of whom had the same destinations. One of the girls was called Gertrud.

Throughout his time in Amiens, he was enrolled as a guest student at the Ecole des Beau Arts and frequently attended the courses on offer.

In this context, we are told of his teacher Henri Lerondeau (he was too good for Paris), who always asked his pupils to paint what they wanted to paint from top to bottom with a single stroke using large movements, so that the new would emerge from their own bodies.

Henri Lerondeau also visited him later in St Martin de Peille.

1937/38

Last school year in Amiens.

Michel does his military service.

1938/39

Transfer to Reims, Collège St Joseph

He was asked by a Jesuit superior (Père Jean Vinatier?), who had also moved to Reims, whether he could come to Reims, where a teacher had been cancelled.

During this time, he studied the ideas of Taillard de Chardin, which he was able to do to a greater extent in a Jesuit environment. He also considered the idea of travelling to China.

The proximity of the library and swimming pool to the college was also very pleasant.

1939

The draft notice had to be handed in personally. He received it a few days late as the police officers responsible had not found him immediately in the high mountains where he was travelling with the scouts.

September 1939: Mobilisation

He was stationed in the north of France to receive "heavy water" in Narvic with the British. Heavy water is necessary for the construction of an atomic bomb. This is probably why Hitler occupied Narvic.

10 May 1940

A diary is kept from this point onwards. (But this is not available.) Attack on Dunkirk. The Germans had destroyed all the French aeroplanes on the ground. On this day they set off in the direction of Antwerp, on to Dunkirk. The whole town was on fire. All the military depots were on fire. (Deep impressions arise here, which are described in apocalyptic terms. They partly influenced JR's paintings).

4.6.1940

Preparations for the "embarquement" of the English. He saw the absolute end coming in these battles. Together with 40,000 other soldiers, he was captured by the Germans that day. They travelled to East Prussia on a cattle transport.

Prisoner of war in Stargard near Danzig

He had planned or unsuccessfully attempted to escape three times during his time in the camp.

1942

He was deployed in various places: e.g. on farms, of which one small farm is described particularly impressively, because the farmer, who knew his son Horatius was deployed in the Caucasus, treated him as a substitute son at certain times. He particularly remembers Christmas 1942/43.

He also worked on the motorway. During the camp, he drew many portraits for his comrades, set up a puppet theatre and worked in the library.

1943

Because as a medic he was a non-combatant under the Geneva Convention, he was released to France in June 1943, requested by the French Red Cross.

During the camp, he met a priest, a German teacher, director of a school in Paris, who worked in the camp secretariat and therefore had a lot of information at his disposal. To his displeasure (?), he initially took up residence in the neighbouring bed (2nd floor). He received a lot of up-to-date information from France from him:

At this time, Cardinal Suhard founded the Mission de France. This was a free order that had formulated the working-class priesthood as its central idea. This idea had inspired him.

He first heard about it in Stargard in 1942, which led to one of the escape attempts. He wrote to France asking for more information and - back in France - ended up in Lisieux, a place of pilgrimage, where a building had been found to found a seminary.

(As a priest, he could imagine working in a religious order, in the Middle Ages perhaps with the Benedictines, later perhaps also with the Dominicans, even later with the Jesuits, but never in the official church practised in each case).

In Lisieux, he was received by Père Augros. He immediately got a bad impression, because when he arrived there hungry, he was not even invited to eat, but was given an address by him where he should go to eat. Père Augros was not very friendly.

1944

In November 1944, he joined the Mission de France to try it out first. When he arrived in Lisieux, his name was not on the list, as he had not written again after the first interview.

During this time, he received a rival offer from a Dominican who had founded something similar to Mission de France. However, he was never available, so the "Holy Spirit" probably decided in his favour.

Five years of study followed: 2 years of philosophy, 3 years of theology

1 year was supposed to be an "open year", for inner examination in daily life. However, as he had been imprisoned and had previously worked as a teacher for a long time, this was waived.

During the semester break, he worked in various places, e.g. on ships etc.

During this time, he had also considered becoming a working priest in the shipping/maritime industry.

1948

March: Ordination to the priesthood in Lisieux by Cardinal Suhard.

-On the way to the cathedral, Père Augros asked him how deep his connection to the sea was. He suggested that he go to the Paris film studios, as he had an artistic streak.

During this time, Père Paul Bendéle headed the Paris section of the Mission de France.

Père Jacques Hollande, who was probably the link between Cardinal Suhard and the rest of the Mission de France, then sent him to the studios as deputy chief electrician.

He worked there, with many interruptions, until 1954.

During these interruptions, he worked on the electrification of the railway, as a driver in Paris and also as a lorry driver for the Americans in Morocco. He also trained as a lathe operator/milling cutter.

1954

The Vatican distrusts the Mission de France, fears communist infiltration and forbids normal daily, eight-hour working hours. Only three hours a day are allowed, which is unthinkable in a factory.

The mission is therefore to be cancelled. An ultimatum is issued.

At this time, Cardinal Suhard's successor, Cardinal Feltin, held a meeting in Remboullie on the future of the mission. The priests of the Mission de France were advised to look for a situation in which they could earn a living. He had recalled his artistic abilities and wanted to try to earn a living in this way

At this time, the Chinese Père Wang, who was suffering from a lung disease, was entrusted to him in Paris. Therefore, he could only work in the mountains. Jacques was to help him look after two communities on the Swiss border (Jura).

Throughout the summer, he painted frescoes in a church in Glay (Montbéliard (Peugeot) region).

At the end of 1954, he trained as a potter in Angoulême. Here he was supposed to continue a fresco work that a student of the "Beaux Arts" had started but not completed. However, he did not want to do this. As compensation, he complied with the parish priest's wishes and built a large sculpture of St Jacques near the church.

He also received a commission to paint frescoes in Port St. Louis near Marseille. However, this church would have stood on saltpetre, which made painting impossible. The church would have been completely yellow. So he could not paint any frescoes there.

A friend had visited him there. He lived in a castle-like house in Gardanne. He was making stained glass windows for a Romanesque church in Cabries and asked him to work with him. He had no idea what he was doing. It was no problem, he said, he should just come to his studio. He would show him a little of the mechanical work, the rest was the work of a painter.

He also got the important addresses for lead and glass from him.

He created his first window there and would have stayed there all winter.

His dream was to buy a mill and set up a studio there. But all the ones he found were sold.

1955

Later, he also created windows in Paris.

A friend of his, Père Jacques Chauvin, also a painter, wanted to join forces with him. They both met Superieur Augros, who suggested that they spend a year together making windows for a church in St Jean de Tholome, south-east of Geneva. He stayed there with his confrere until the work was completed in 1966.

His connection with the Misson de France still existed. In 1956, a general assembly was convened. There, a Père Jean Vinatier asked him whether he was still looking for his mill. A chapel had been entrusted to the mission, where he could set up his studio.

1956

June. He has an excellent impression of the shell of the chapel and the surrounding area. He has his first contact with the Curé de Peille, who donated the chapel. It was not yet possible to live there. 1000 fireflies flew around the chapel at night.

1957

he then moved into the chapel in St Martin de Peille.

Jacques Riousse died on 4 December 2004 in Peille