

**00:00**      **ROGER** What I wanted to tell you —I don't know if it's the right moment for your thing — is that between her wedding and her death she lived 196 months, including 72 of pregnancy. You... you never added it up, right?

**00:32**      **ANITA** She had said to Auntie Marguerite: « Marguerite, I'm pregnant again ». And Marguerite went « Ooooooh! » « —Hey, you're not gonna pass out! », she said.  
*She laughs.*

**00:50**      **DENISE** And then, some time after, the aunt would arrive —her mother's sister— to take care of the children while she was giving birth. And she would say « Oh, right! I heard noises during the night », and then they would tell them « You have a new little brother » or « a new little sister ».

*Heavy rubbing mineral sound starts.*

**01:11**      **JEAN-PAUL** At morning, my uncle came to take me see Mum on her death bed. That's it.

**01:23**      **MADO with emotion** You know, there's been a *mutism* —that's what I say—, a silence about Mum's death!

**01:30**      *Heavy mineral final bang. Singing blackbird. Indistinct chatter during a family reunion.*

**01:55**      **MY COUSIN ODILE** How are you?  
**ME** Fine, and you?  
**MY COUSIN ODILE** Are you... recording?  
**ME** Yes.  
**MY COUSIN ODILE** Oh, boy!

**02:06** **NARRATOR** The first thing you learn about being a Latxague is that you'll have to get used to hearing your last name butchered.

**02:17**      **ANITA** Me, when I say that I am Madame Latxague, they tell me « Ah ! La pègue [which means « The crazy »] » and they're not really wrong. *She laughs.*

**02:25** **NARRATOR** Us, we say « La-tsaag », but those who want to show they know it's Basque pronounce a good cracking « La-chaag ».

**02:33**      **ANITA laughing** Bless you!

**02:37** **NARRATOR** The Latxagues get together in family reunions about every two years. It brings together about fifty people. The rest of the time, we barely see each other.

**MY COUSIN PIERRE** Sangria doesn't match with cheese!

**NARRATOR** As for me, I grew up in Spain, so it took me some time to get to know them well.

**02:55**      **ME** What is a Latxague for you?  
**MY COUSIN DELPHINE** Firstly, it's the Basque Country. It's the really strong family type, even if some live far away.

**03:05**      **MY COUSIN AGNÈS** They are there for each other, I think. If one of us has a problem, the others will be there.

**03:15**      **ANITA** It can be someone very nice, but...

**03:26**      *The laughing and chatting gets louder.*

**MY COUSIN CÉCILE** A caustic humor, between deadpan and... a lot of irony!

- 03:35 **MICHEL *laughing*** A lot of people will tell you that they are assholes. You understand? It seems we have a sharp and hurtful tongue. Sometimes it's slighting... and it feels good!
- 03:57 **DENISE** Well, with something of this grandfather, who was very present in my life —very present, and very oppressive— and this grandmother who was very present, even despite the unspoken, and a bit mythical.

*Basque traditional song « Haurrak ikasazue » [« Learn, children »] whistled with reverb.*

- 04:26 **ANITA** Anyhow, they think they know *the* truth, no doubt about it. That's a Latxague! ***She laughs.***
- 04:36 **TITLE** *Germaine or the unspoken.* A documentary directed by Claire Latxague.  
**SUBTITLE** Part One: The Personal.
- 04:47 *Footsteps in the forest, looking for penny buns with my father.*
- 04:48 **NARRATOR** The Latxagues are the descendants of Joseph Latxague and Germaine Damestoy. The couple lived in an apartment of the Lahubiague working-class neighborhood in Bayonne, and they had seven children:

*Wall clock starts to ring and stops after seven dongs.*

- 05:09 **NARRATOR** Roger, André, Josette, Jean-Paul, Mado, Michel and Bernard, my father.

**ME** I saw penny buns over there.

**BERNARD** Yes, there are many of them here, and many more there.

- 05:15 **NARRATOR** Everybody has heard stories about Grandpa Joseph, who always had the last word and was respected in the district. But Germaine, my grandmother, we know very little about her. When we mention her, it is always with the knowing air of someone opening a top secret folder.

- 05:32 **BERNARD** Here you can normally find some. You see one of them and then you see the others.

- 05:37 **NARRATOR** I know she was a dressmaker and that her pregnancies came one after another. About one baby every two years.

- 05:43 **BERNARD** You see five of them, and finally you pick twelve.

- 05:45 **NARRATOR** I know that before my father, she had had a little Maïté, who had died from meningitis at the age of four months. And I know she died from tetanus when she was 36, in 1946, before my father, the youngest, had reached two.

- 06:03 **BERNARD** My name is Bernard Latxague and I am the seventh.  
***His voice in the forest*** Watch your step!

- 06:10 **NARRATOR** It was the official story, the one my father had grown with. Nobody had ever questioned it. In any case, talking about Germaine would mean talking about sad things, so we didn't talk about it.

- 06:33 **ME** So, when you were a child, do you remember anyone explaining what had happened...?

**BERNARD *interrupting me*** No. No-no. I never knew —I don't remember when I was finally told that I was two years old when my mother died. But explanations, never.  
***Laughing*** The only thing I remember hearing is that nobody wanted to take care of me and that my father had been told to leave me at an orphanage. And that's how I ended up at my aunt's.

**07:04**      **BERNARD** We talked about her —how can I say?— accidentally. She was always evoked. But never at home —I mean at my aunt’s— nor in a storytelling way. For example, my father, would say with a tear in his eye: « Germaine’s mutton stew was the best » and then he would shed a tear.

*Wind in the trees and birds.*

**07:35**      **MICHEL** I can say that my father, for example, when he was driving, always used to sing songs about someone who was gone and never turned back. That was his thing.

**NARRATOR** Michel, the sixth.

**MICHEL** I think he was completely into it.

*Blackbird singing.*

**07:55**      **JEAN-PAUL** Yes, we used to talk about her. Like: « I went to see the grave ». Yes! We talked about Mum. I don’t know if we talked about her with Dad because he was doing his stuff and he was mostly focused on feeding and bringing us up. You had to handle him with kid gloves!

**08:18**      **Smiling** My name is Jean-Paul and I am « the sandwich » between my siblings: two boys, one girl, one boy —that’s me!—, and then one girl and two boys.

**ME** But also with Maïté...

**JEAN-PAUL** Yes, Maïté. And when you realize she got married in 1930, it means that, in sixteen years, she carried out eight pregnancies!

*Sound of waves.*

**08:50**      **NARRATOR** I know what it is like to avoid talking about sad things, because I also lost my mother when I was young. Trying to talk about her was always very complicated. You grow up thinking that asking questions could tumble the universe in an ocean full of tears. So there is a conversation that my father, my uncles and my aunts could never have, and that I tried to recreate through my microphone.

*Sound of waves fades into different birds singing and chirping.*

**09:40**      **NARRATOR** The circumstances of Germaine’s death have been taboo for a long time, and it has almost erased her from our family memory. In order to avoid talking about her death, we stopped talking about her, and thus we have maintained a family secret.

*Heavy mineral bang.*

**10:00**      **NARRATOR** Family secrets are things that you know but don’t talk about. That you have *understood* you can’t talk about.

*Heavy mineral rubbing and rumbling sound getting stronger and faster.*

**NARRATOR** You have felt the embarrassed silences, pricked up your ears when there were insinuations, lowered your eyes in front of euphemisms. And you have been scared of angry outbursts. It is frightening to reawaken sadness and to see the restraint collapse.

*Soft moving polishing sound starts...*

**10:26**      **NARRATOR** But now I’m even more afraid of never knowing Germaine’s story because I never dared to ask questions.

*Quick wiping sound.*

10:36 *Papers being handled.*

**MADO** *sighing* I had prepared a lot of things... Stop with your hairy thing!

**ME** It filters out the « puh-puh » Do you want to begin by reading what you've written?

**MADO** Yes, I think so.

**ME** Ok

**MADO** *with emotion* Because I wrote it in several times, and in good conditions that help me writing things I can't talk about.

**NARRATOR** Mado, the fifth.

11:11 **MADO** It is through pictures, that have become mythical in this family — representations of the family around the kitchen table, or for a great occasion: the Communion, a picnic...— some little photographs —I don't know who has them nor who doesn't— that my memories got frozen. I think I have —deliberately or not, and because of what we call a trauma— obscured a great part of how my early childhood was. I can see myself, in this kitchen, sitting between the dresser and the window, and sucking my thumb.

*Swifts singing and church bell ringing.*

12:02 **MADO** Mum's life? By the sink, the oven, the sewing machine... Late at night, when we were sleeping, she used to sew.

12:21 **ROGER** I have more often seen my mother washing clothes or sewing than talking with us. I am Roger, the eldest of the siblings, born September the 8th, 1931. What I remember about my mother, personally, is when I was in sixth or seventh grade, fighting with a math problem, and there she said: « Try like this, try like that! » until we got a result. That, I remember. But I was sitting at the kitchen table, and her back was turned while she was washing clothes in the sink.

13:09 *Swifts chirping.*

13:13 **ROGER** My father always had a garden where he could raise a pig. And for Mum, killing the pig meant receiving the whole family. I mean, Dad's family came to prepare the cooked meat and, at seven or eight, came Mum's family to eat the first cold cut.

13:39 *Indistinct chatter during a family reunion. Whistling « Haurrak ikasazue ». Chirping insects.*

**ROGER** *excited* And there, the great white tablecloth, her best cutlery... she knew how to host! It was every year!

14:01 **MICHEL** *with emotion* My mother...my mother, I knew her very little. I know that one day that we had killed the pig she had made me a white apron and I had helped the others kill the pig. I remember this white apron.

*Laughs and chatter.*

14:23 **ROGER** Then, what I can tell you, is that I'd always seen her dressed in a black suit.

**MICHEL** I understand she was always all dressed up,...

**ROGER** She was always perfect.

**MICHEL** ...that the children were always very well dressed.

*Children shouting and playing.*

**14:38**        **MADO** On Saturdays, I think, she gave us the bath in the wash boiler.  
**JEAN-PAUL *excited*** We never lacked anything, even in summer, we were the only kids wearing espadrilles!  
**MICHEL** She ran the shop, she heated the pot... It certainly was terrible, I mean...

*Wall clock starts to ring...*

**14:56**        **MICHEL** ...it was life back in the old days.

*...and finishes after seven times.*

**15:05**        **MADO *with tears in the voice*** I have no memories of hugging, nor moments of... I don't know. There certainly was a lot of love but there wasn't time to say it.

*Children playing.*

**15:22**        **ROGER *disappointed*** But what I regret is that my mother left too soon and we didn't make her talk enough, we didn't make her talk enough, and there are huge gaps!

*Country road and birds.*

**15:37**        **BERNARD** No, no, I never felt I missed anything. When you don't know something, you can't feel it missing. I have no memories of a life with my mother so I can't miss her — also because she's been replaced.

**16:05** *Basque lullaby « Aurtxoá Seaskan » [« The beautiful boy »] played by a guitar and filtered in a nostalgic way...*

**BERNARD** There was a picture in my father's room, a big photography, that's the only image I have. She was a beautiful woman.

**16:25** *Pages of a photograph album turning.*

**ROGER** There she is! You don't have this one.

**16:31** **NARRATOR** Germaine,...

**ME** Dad has a smaller one.

**NARRATOR** ...in profile...

**ROGER** Too bad you don't have a scanner.

**16:40** **NARRATOR** ... with a leaning head, eyes lowered...

**ME** It was before her marriage.

**ROGER** Yes! At twenty, or a bit younger. And there's the wedding.

**NARRATOR** ...a small smile hardly shaped, short-cut hair to the jaw, softly waving on her face.

*Wall clock tick-tack.*

**17:17**        **ANITA** Roger was born in 31... and Bernard was born in 44.

**NARRATOR** Anita, Michel's wife.

**17:29** ANITA And meanwhile she has had...  
MICHEL Eight children.

**NARRATOR** Eight children.

ANITA Yes eight, with Maïté, and Bernard, yes. Including Roger and Bernard. Well, I think it-it's quite a lot.

**17:50** MADO It was the education girls received — and part of the education I have received — that dictates you should do this or that.

JEAN-PAUL *amused* I don't know if you remember the joke I made when they asked me for a speech during the second to last family reunion. I said « If they had had the pill, we would have been a lot less at the table ». And I, for one, would never have been there!

**18:15** MADO *shocked* The questions I ask myself are about the childbirths. Mum has always given birth at home! But where were we, in these moments? How did it happen? It's unbelievable, unbelievable!

**18:28** *Sound of a Basque pelota game...*

MICHEL Even at Lahubiague there were families of five, four children...

JEAN-PAUL There were Spanish families, maybe, that were...

MICHEL ...but seven, really few. There were Pierrette's parents but...

JEAN-PAUL ...the Sanzs,...

MICHEL ...the youngest was Roger and André's age, you see.

JEAN-PAUL ...yes, at the Sanzs there were a lot of children...

MICHEL There was one family of six...

JEAN-PAUL ...at least five...

MICHEL ...but not-not many.

JEAN-PAUL ...as big as us, no.

MICHEL *angry* I don't understand why they didn't go get a medic to stop the nonsense, fuck, it's crazy!

*... the game stops with a strong smash with big delay effect.*

**19:07** ANITA How old was she in 46?

MICHEL 36 years old.

**NARRATOR** 36 years old.

ANITA She died in 46 and now we know why.

MICHEL *irritated* No, we don't know why, but it is so obvious.

*Deep mineral bang sound.*

**19:32** *Park in the background and tong and mouth sounds in the foreground.*

**NARRATOR** When I was a child, I asked my father why he didn't have a mummy.

*Inner voice singing a Spanish children counting-out rhyme: « —Spotted, spotted whistle... »*

**19:41** **NARRATOR** My father told me she had died of tetanus. That it was a disease we could catch by gardening. A disease that was in the soil. But that today there was a vaccine and that I was vaccinated.

**19:51** *Inner voice continues « ...where are you going so beautiful?... »*

**19:56 NARRATOR** So for me, tetanus was a disease of the past, that I pictured in black and white. A time when one could die for nothing. I used to think about it when I played outside and looked at my muddy nails, my red-spotted knees.

*Inner voice continues « ...—To the green plot... »*

**20:17 NARRATOR** The word tetanus came back to me...

*Inner voice continues « ...Pim-pam-poom... »*

**NARRATOR** ...and I thought I was really lucky to be able to play and scratch myself without fear.

*Inner voice continues with reverb and delay « ...Out! »*

*Heavy mineral sound starts rubbing.*

**20:30 BERNARD** What I officially knew is that she had died of tetanus. When I heard that, I didn't even know what tetanus was!

**MADO assertive** It was the version I had, and that I believed for a long time. « My mother died of tetanus ».

**BERNARD** I don't know if it was because of a question I asked but I don't remember feeling the curiosity to know.

**20:55** *Deep and heavy percussive sound.*

**MADO** We had put it down to the fact that she sewed a lot — I don't know...

**JEAN-PAUL assertive** Anyway, dead of tetanus, she is.

*Heavy mineral sound bangs faster and louder and then stops.*

**21:11 JEAN-PAUL** Now, me, I can't tell you if it is because of a ninth pregnancy, I haven't got a clue.

*Mourning church bell starting to ring slowly.*

**JEAN-PAUL** Nobody ever let me in on the secret. But now, with life experience, after you've seen so many things, you can consider that it's a possibility.

**21:33 BERNARD** If I ever thought about it, it probably was after what *you* told me...that Sophie had told you. I was flabbergasted when you told me that day. I had never heard these kinds of things in the family and I was a little upset against Sophie because I asked myself where did she bring it out from. And Michou, two days ago, told me: « It was probably me ». Okay. After a meal of brothers and sisters — there was Roger, Jean-Paul, Josette, Mado and him. They talked about the thing, and he told me that Mado and Roger absolutely refused the idea, because of their beliefs...

**22:27 NARRATOR** On the branches of the family tree, each name sings its own melody.

*Birds chirping while the seventh and last dong rings.*

**22:34 NARRATOR** There are those who know but don't tell, those who knew but can't remember anymore, those who imagine without daring to admit it to themselves. There are also those about whom we used to say that they have never accepted the truth, and who, in front of the microphone, are finally the only ones to be ready to tell it to me.

**23:00**      **ROGER** *assertive* She died on May the 30th, 1946.  
              **ME** And you think she was pregnant.  
              **ROGER** *outraged* She had an abortion all by herself! I found out on Josette's wedding day, when my father had rented a bus and I was with Odette sitting in front of my father and aunt Madeleine, and that's how I realized the truth. And when I wanted to tell Odette she said: « Everyone knew it in the neighborhood ». Oh well, very good!

**23:38**      **ME** And then you told your brothers and sisters?  
              **ROGER** *whispering* I don't think so, no. *Embarrassed* For me, the subject was too delicate. No, no, no, no, no. No... No.

*Nightingale starts to sing with other birds.*

**24:00**      **BERNARD** Even Michou would tell you that — we were talking about it the other day — he was four and has no memory of it.  
              **ME** And Josette didn't talk about it either?  
              **BERNARD** I didn't have any occasions to talk with her about it. I wasn't with her very often. However, she surely must be in the know of everything.

**24:23**      **NARRATOR** I know that Josette, the third, is the one who holds the key of many secrets.

**FRANCIS (Josette's husband)** *tenderly* Speak a little, darling, speak.

**24:33**      **NARRATOR** But since she has Parkinson's disease, she has difficulty speaking.

**JOSETTE** [Incomprehensible words.]

**NARRATOR** Her daughter, Denise, warns me kindly so that I don't get my expectations too high.

**24:45**      **JOSETTE** I don't remember anymore.  
              **MY COUSIN CISOT AND ME** You don't remember anymore?

**24:50**      **NARRATOR** However, Josette had been the first one to accept to be recorded, she was ready to talk. But, by the time I came back to see her, she couldn't really speak anymore.

**25:04**      **ME** Would you like to tell us some memories about your mummy, about Germaine?  
              **JOSETTE** *amused* Can I talk to the cat, too?  
              **ME** You want to talk to the cat? It's not a cat, it is to filter out the parasitic noises.

**25:25**      **NARRATOR** Her daughter, Denise, accepted to tell me what her mother had passed down to her.

**DENISE** My mother was aware of her mother's cause of death. It wasn't a secret. She told me when I was a young teenager, when I was able to hear it. So I have the feeling, in my relationship with my mother, that there hasn't been unsaid things. But lately, talking about it with Delphine, my youngest daughter, I think she told me that she had only just found out.

*Soft polishing sound with reverb.*

**26:05**      **DENISE** I said to her: « We've never talked about it because we never had any discussion about this grandmother, but... ». She thought she had just discovered a secret and I told her that I was sure it wasn't a secret.

*Quick wiping sound puts an end to the polishing.*

**26:20**      **DENISE** I knew that... that... she... yes... that she had done a termination of pregnancy by herself, but I don't know where the children were, I don't know... I can't say anything more about it.

**26:36** *Indistinct chatter during a family reunion.*

**NARRATOR** Denise is my only female cousin to have heard from her mother's mouth that Germaine was dead after trying to have an abortion. I don't remember how I found out. But I know it finally began to spread, from one female cousin to another. I think I was the one who told my father. That's what *he* says, but I don't remember. What is for sure is that this subject comes back at every family reunion.

**27:10** *Whistling the Basque song « Haurrak ikasazue » in reverb over the chatting.*

**27:14 NARRATOR** All you have to do is lend an ear as you walk from one table to another. There's always a table with a group of female and male cousins which ends up talking about it. There's always someone who hears about it for the first time. There are never any of the brothers and sisters of my father at this table.

**27:37 MADO with emotion** I had never doubted what I had been told. And I never had any explanation from anyone about it. Until — you'll think it's funny, but I don't — my 50th birthday when, I don't know why, the subject came up — you'll have to ask Mireille. Mireille had discussed it with her godmother, Josette, but I don't remember that we ever talked about it directly, my sister and I.

*Videophone starts ringing.*

**28:14 MADO stunned** At the age of 50 I received it like a smack on the head.

**28:22 ME** Hello. Can you hear me?

**MIREILLE** Claire?

**ME** Yes?

**MIREILLE** I hear you but I can't see you. Was it through WhatsApp or did you send me a link?

**ME** I sent you a Zoom link.

**MIREILLE** Okay, okay. I'm coming. Sorry, I had a... I'm coming.

**ME** Alright. See you.

**28:40 MIREILLE** So, I am Mireille, Mado's eldest daughter and Josette is my godmother. I knew my grandmother had died, I didn't know how, and it is something that had always intrigued me. And we clearly felt that it was a subject that wasn't addressed. And it's a subject I had never dared to address with my mother either — not even asking her a question that she wouldn't answer, or to which she would answer she didn't know. It was a subject I couldn't address with her and that I dared address with Jo,... maybe because we were talking about life at Lahubiague.

**29:18** *Nightingale singing.*

**29:28 MIREILLE** To set the context, I probably was 15 or 16, and was visiting them for a week. And she told me what she knew, but I think she hadn't necessarily seen — obviously — all the process. However, she described to me what she had discovered: she remembers her mother lying down with lots of blood everywhere, and herself discovering the scene and feeling lost, not knowing what to do. I think that my grandfather called one of his sisters. And she tells me that this happened because my grandmother was expecting her ninth child and used a knitting needle to try to abort by herself. So, she tells me. I'm in shock. After the week of holiday, I come back home. My mother is in the kitchen. I show up in the kitchen. My mother asks me how things went during the week. And I say

**30:27 (happy voice):** « It was really great. I talked a lot with Jo. She told me how my grandmother died ». And Mum says to me **(shocked voice):** « Really? So, how did she die? » —I could never imagine that my mother didn't know that!

**31:00** And... I tell her (*informative voice*): « Well, she took a knitting needle to abort by herself the child she was expecting ». *Embarrassed* At the very moment I tell her, I realize that she doesn't know, that I am telling her something awful about her mother like that, brutally, without preparation. I first thought she was verifying what Jo had told me and when I told her how it happened she said (*sharp voice*): « Well, it's the first time I hear about it ».

**31:38** *Quick polishing sound and mineral rubbing sound mixed together backwards. The sound stops on a high-pitched note.*

**31:46** **MIREILLE** I felt an enormous weight for having told her everything like that. If I had known that she didn't know and that I was informing her I wouldn't have said it like that. She didn't say anything. She just said: « I didn't know », and she kept everything to herself.

**32:10** **ME** And do you remember when you told your sisters and then how...?

**MIREILLE interrupting me** I didn't tell my sisters.

**ME** Oh, okay.

**MIREILLE** I didn't tell my sisters. Oh no. Anyway, that day, I clearly didn't say anything more and it stayed between my mother and me. Was it me who informed my sisters? I don't know. It took several years before we could talk about it quite normally.

**32:40** *Chirping birds and Spanish voices in a park.*

**32:49** **NARRATOR** In Spain, people have two last names, one from the father and one from the mother. I thought it was pretty good, better than the French system. But I thought it could be improved. So, when I was a child, I signed my drawings with the last names of both of my grandmothers. It sounded like that: « Claire Latxague Mercier Damestoy Dupont ». At the bottom of a princess with long dress, surrounded by flying hearts in the sky, my double-barreled signature was my first act of feminist visibility.

**33:22** *Writing and drawing sound.*

**33:26** **NARRATOR** Damestoy was Germaine's last name, but for a long time I pronounced it like the Spanish.

*Spanish inner voice: « Damestoy ».*

**33:34** **NARRATOR** In my mind, it was like a mix between a « dame » and the first person singular of the verb « *estar* », which means to be at a certain place...

**33:44** *Spanish inner voice: « Am I here... »*

**NARRATOR** ...or to be in a certain state.

*Spanish inner voice: « ...or am I not? ».*

**33:50** **NARRATOR** I think I wrote it on my drawings to say that Germaine was here,...

*French inner voice: « Are you here, Germaine? ».*

**NARRATOR** ...somewhere through the last of her granddaughters.

**34:00** *French inner voice with delay: « Germaine, are you here? ».*

**34:05** **SUBTITLE** Part Two: The Politics.

*Footsteps in the forest.*

**34:17** **NARRATOR** When I started this investigation, I was afraid to question my family and to confront adults who kept a secret.

*Blackbird chirping and flying away.*

**34:29** **NARRATOR** In fact, I found children who were still asking themselves questions. Trying to reconstitute Germaine's life means constantly having trouble with missing tracks.

*Faster footsteps on a path.*

**34:44** **NARRATOR** There are no letters to browse, no official documents. Only a few photographic records and some dishes in an old sideboard.

*A car passes by.*

**34:59** **NARRATOR** But some dates and facts reveal the marks of an era on her life course.

**35:12** *Blackbird chirping loudly. Sound of an album being handled.*

**DENISE** No, it's not here... Blast. **She inhales** It says « Family tree: Bertrand », so it means on her mother's side. And so he gave me that to find the ancestors and descendants of my parents.

**35:38** **NARRATOR** Germaine is born in Anglet, on August the 30th, 1909. She is an orphan from the age of four because her mother dies giving birth to her little sister Odette. Then, one year later, both of the girls are separated from their father, mobilized in 1914.

**35:55** *Fireworks exploding.*

**MADO** And he left for four years, during which...

**MADO and NARRATOR (together)**...he doesn't get any leave.

**NARRATOR** ...until the end of the war, despite the fact that he is a widower with two dependent children.

**36:08** **MADO** How is that even possible?

*Final big fireworks explosion*

**ME** So, of Germaine's family, we don't have much pictures.

**DENISE** No.

**ME** Not one.

**DENISE** Of her sister, for example, no.

**36:18** **NARRATOR** At the age of eleven, she's the eldest of a blended family. Her father gets married with a single mother, against most of his family's advice.

**ROGER outraged** They never forgave him.

**NARRATOR** Certain ties are broken.

**ROGER *revolted*** He was abandoned.

**36:33 NARRATOR** I tell myself that Germaine enters her teenage years with two female models for whom maternity had a high cost.

*Insects flying and birds chirping.*

**36:44 NARRATOR** Then, I imagine that as the eldest she must have helped her stepmother take care of the children. But for the rest...

**36:55 ME *surprised*** It is difficult to make the connection between this Germaine and the one in the other pictures.

**DENISE** Yes, yes, indeed.

**37:02 NARRATOR** Afterwards, I know she completes an apprenticeship and becomes a dressmaker like her mother. She works in a big sewing studio when she meets Joseph, my grandfather.

*Quick footsteps and bicycle passing by in the street.*

**ROGER *excited*** And Dad, when he would come out of the rugby stadium, used to go to this dance hall!

**37:17 NARRATOR** She marries him in 1930 at the age of 21. He is 28.

**ROGER *proudly*** I am happy that you've learned something new from me.

**37:26 NARRATOR** Their first child is born the next year, which means that, between 1931 and 1938, Germaine completes five pregnancies. And another three during the Occupation.

**37:37 ME** So, here you have four children: Roger, André, Josette and Jean-Paul.

**DENISE** Yes.

**ME *moved*** You really recognize Josette in this picture.

**DENISE** Yes indeed !

**37:45 NARRATOR** Meanwhile, her sister Odette, had only one child.

**DENISE** So, here you can already see Mado, and there's a younger one, Michou.

*Swifts chirping.*

**37:57 NARRATOR** I don't know when Germaine stopped working in the sewing studio. What I know is that, in addition to the housework, she also helped Joseph run a grocery shop in the Lahubiague district during several years.

*Piano playing a melancholic melody.*

**38:11 MICHEL** This is the entrance of the grocery shop that my father and my mother ran until the beginning of the war, here!

**38:20 NARRATOR** All these things were accomplished by Germaine while she was either pregnant or still recovering from childbirth, and always with one or two very young children next to her.

**38:34 ME** No, Ruben, I'm asking you to let go of me, please.

**RUBEN** Can I close it?

**ME *annoyed*** Alex! Can you take Ruben to the bath, please?

**38:44** *Piano played by a little child.*

**NARRATOR** We are used to saying that thanks to Joseph, who is hard-working and crafty, the family never feels hungry during the war. The children grow up well. Germaine copes, accompanies their schooling, sews, washes and mends their clothes. She scolds them when they mess around, treats them when they fall ill.

*Back to the melancholic melody with nostalgic reverb.*

**39:05** **DENISE** When my mother was a refugee, during the war, she was in the Basque Country, in a farm. And she says that she was sick and that one night she dreamt that her mother was next to her and that, when she woke up, her mother was stroking her head, and in fact she was delousing her. And this was really a good memory.

**39:36** **NARRATOR** 42 is a really punishing year for Germaine. On April the 25th, Maité, the seventh, dies from an aggressive meningitis at the age of four months. A few months later, Germaine also loses her sister Henriette from tuberculosis at the age of twenty. It is probably the reason why people say she was always dressed in black. Thus, it's a grieving woman who gets pregnant again in 1943.

*Indistinct chatter.*

**40:03** **NARRATOR** For this new pregnancy, which gives birth to my father, she needs to count on family solidarity because Germaine has to live five or six months alone with her children while Joseph is a prisoner of the Germans.

**40:19** **JEAN-PAUL** He worked at the Feldkommandantur. They caught him with a slab of butter.

*Church bell ringing.*

**40:26** **NARRATOR** Apparently, he's released in time for the birth of my father, a few months before the Germans left.

*Train passing.*

**40:41** **NARRATOR** Did Germaine have time to rest ?

**JEAN-PAUL** Sometimes, Mum would go downtown, in a hurry. We would go with her on the double.

**40:47** **NARRATOR** Maybe she found comfort in the church.

**JEAN-PAUL** We would cross the cemetery,...

**MADO** We all had our Communion, we all...

**40:53** **NARRATOR** Maybe she was even congratulated by the priest of the parish for her beautiful and big family,...

**JEAN-PAUL** ...we would stop at Maité's grave.

**41:01** **NARRATOR** ...and for her courage.

**MADO** *mechanically* « I renounce the devil and all his works, and I believe in Jesus Christ... » —we all recited the words.

*Child running in the street.*

**41:11 NARRATOR** I imagine that despite a hard life she lived happy moments,...

**ROGER *happily*** They liked the operetta,...

**41:20 NARRATOR** ... gave herself some breaks...

*Birds chirping.*

**ROGER *happily*** ...so I heard them hum the refrains!

**41:25 NARRATOR** ...and time to dream of her children's future.

**41:27 ROGER *assertive*** She would have liked to have an electrician for a son. For her it was the future!

**MADO** Roger said that if she had lived...

**ROGER** Ah!

**MADO** ...we would all have taken the Baccalaureat exam.

**ROGER** For sure! She would have been proud.

**MADO** I think so too!

**JEAN-PAUL *with tears in his voice*** I'm really sorry for her that she didn't see what happened next.

**ROGER** Oh boy, of course!

**JEAN-PAUL *with tears in his voice*** I always think about it.

*Blackbird chirping.*

**41:49 NARRATOR** Maybe she also was part of the women who exercised their right to vote for the first time for the municipal elections of April 1945.

**ROGER *impressed*** I heard her say: « One day, you'll see, we'll have the cinema at home! »

**42:03 NARRATOR** And maybe she thought, at the Liberation of France, that a new stage of her life was about to start.

*Out of tune piano playing the Basque lullaby « Aurtxo seaskan ».*

**42:11 NARRATOR** Maybe. But we'll never know anything about Germaine's thoughts. On May 26th, 1946, on Mother's Day, she's interned at Bayonne's hospital where she dies four days later, likely of abortion related consequences.

**42:31 MADO, JEAN-PAUL, ROGER, MICHEL and BERNARD**  
***Voices mixed up together and gradually filtered like old transistors.***

**MADO *laughing absurdly*** No but... it was... well.

**JEAN-PAUL** Otherwise, in 1944...

**MADO** We were immersed in this education by tradition...

**JEAN-PAUL** ...after Biarritz's bombing we were sent somewhere else...

**ROGER *solemnly*** She had a chore that was important for her...

**JEAN-PAUL** ...we had to be evacuated from Bayonne if we could.

**ROGER *solemnly*** ...she deloused us.

**MICHEL *assertive*** My mother was very devout.

**JEAN-PAUL** André, Josette and I...

**MADO** ...I don't know, during high school, we were really close to the cathedral, geographically.

**MICHEL *ironically*** There couldn't be someone more devout than her.

**JEAN-PAUL *amused*** ...we were sent there on May Day, I remember, it was on May Day...

**BERNARD** People say that she was very gentle

**MADO** We attended the church, and that's it. It was, it was...

*Singing blackbird.*

- 43:15**            **BERNARD *smiling*** She was a mother, anyway. She could be nothing but gentle.
- 43:31** **NARRATOR** I'll never know what happened during the last months of Germaine's life, how much time passed between the moment she understood she was pregnant again and the day she decided to have an abortion, if she opened up to somebody or if she had to take everything on by herself. So I looked for Germaine's story somewhere else, in the history of the interwar generation of women in France. And thanks to the work of the historian Fabrice Cahen, who dedicated his PhD to the fight against abortion in France and who helped me fill some gaps.
- 44:10**            **FABRICE CAHEN** Of course, this story is fascinating, moving, etc. But from a statistical point of view it's quite ordinary, unfortunately. Of course, there are some small specificities, but in general it's the kind of story I know very well because I read dozens and dozens of them.
- 44:29**            In a death by abortion, there's the horror of the death, but also the potentially misjudged nature of the abortion itself, there's also the story that leads to the abortion. Here we have a case of children overload —if the existence of an abortion is verified, which we'll probably never know.
- 44:52** **NARRATOR** That's right. There are no official traces, no verified facts that could allow us to say that we know the truth. So when I read his book, *Gouverner les mœurs [Controlling lifestyle]*, I first looked for what specifically happened in 1946, as if everything had been decided that very year.
- 45:12**            **FABRICE CAHEN** If we think in terms of legal risks, it was really the worst period in history. The repressive machine still works at full capacity. Human and financial means are bigger than during the Vichy period and the wish to punish is stronger after the Liberation. In terms of prison sentences, the climax is the Vichy regime, but concerning suspended sentences the post-Liberation period reaches a paroxysm.
- 45:42** **NARRATOR** Apparently, Germaine's abortion wasn't the subject of any judicial persecution, but in this time there's such a denunciation and surveillance atmosphere that women who want to have an abortion have not only to hide from the police but also from the rest of the neighborhood.
- 45:59**            **DENISE** The pregnancies came one after another but it was people who told my mother: « Your mother is pregnant again ». ***Skeptically*** « My mother?! No way », she said.
- NARRATOR** And having to hide increases the risks related to the process.
- 46:13**            **FABRICE CAHEN** I think it isn't exaggerated to affirm that the anti-abortion politics generate illness and lethal danger for women. Nonetheless, women rarely doubted that they could, in case of extreme necessity, go to the public hospitals. But, in addition, the fact that they went to the hospital several hours or even days, sometimes, after the symptoms had started, makes me think it wasn't an easy decision for them to take and that they often hesitated.
- 46:50**            **MADO *sadly*** I think I got wind of, or understood, that she was at home in her bed, that her jaws were locked, she couldn't swallow nor... Was it a symptom or a consequence when the disease became...
- 47:09**            **FABRICE CAHEN** So we see that the law-induced aggravation of the risks inherent to clandestine abortion is quite real. And it is only partially modified by the fact that doctors do their job. Anyway, those are elements we can mention to set the context, but how this impacts the mind and body of Germaine, there's no way to know.

**47:36 NARRATOR** In Fabrice Cahen's book, I also looked for the link between abortion and tetanus. What surprised me is that, according to statistics, tetanus was finally the worst possible outcome and the less common. This kind of complication was often due to multiple causes that ended up driving women to accomplish this process alone and in bad sanitary conditions. This is what could happen to the more penniless, isolated and inexperienced among them. But Germaine did not match with this kind of feminine profile.

**48:08 FABRICE CAHEN** The fact that she works in a studio, among very feminized collectivities, from a relatively modest background, even poor, from the working-class, also means she is part of shared information networks. She is in an environment where abortion is something imaginable, which is not always the case.

**48:29 NARRATOR** Even if she didn't work in a studio anymore, every day Germaine spent time with her stepmother, her aunts, her sisters and sisters-in-law. She must or could have been helped in the process. And maybe survive it.

*Deep and heavy rumbling sound.*

**NARRATOR** So why did she do it by herself?

**48:50 FABRICE CAHEN** Is it mainly a question of keeping the secret in absolute discretion? Is it because of her long experience of pregnancy and gestation that she feels she knows her body well enough? Maybe she thinks it's going to be easier for her than for a woman who has never been pregnant or given birth before. Maybe, also, there is someone assisting her as a surgeon —male or female— or an accomplice who vanishes at the right moment. Maybe too, behind this individual and single-handedly operated act, there's some kind of collectiveness, a network that played an upstream part: she managed to gather information, eventually the famous abortive tools, instruments, mediums. Maybe the loneliness of her handiwork dissimulates something much more collective.

**49:53 NARRATOR** Behind Germaine's individual story there's a collective story...

**ROGER** In 42, 43, 44, Aunt Pauline came every Thursday to help my mother.

**50:02 NARRATOR** ...the story of the women who gravitated around her and her family,...

**MADO** Aunt Julia was good as good bread.

**50:09 NARRATOR** ...who saw the pregnancies coming one after another,...

**JEAN-PAUL** Aunt Berthe came every Monday to do the laundry.

**50:15 NARRATOR** ...who, sometimes, became the godmother of her children...

**MADO *whispering*** Aunt Julia and Aunt Marguerite were really great.

**50:22 NARRATOR** Some of those women maybe helped Germaine, more or less directly, when she made her decision. Or maybe I want to believe that Germaine wasn't really alone.

**50:32 MIREILLE** I think she was alone.

**ME** OK.

**MIREILLE** No-no. She did it on her own. I'm quite sure about it.

**50:43 NARRATOR** What I know is that, among all these women, Germaine is the only one who had so many children. And thus, other alternatives would exist before you ended up having an abortion.

**50:53 FABRICE CAHEN** Couples know how to control their fertility, even with so-called natural methods, of course a bit rustic, which are relatively efficient. Having seven children can be partially deliberate, because you must never have a miserabilist point of view, imagining the working-class drowning under unwanted children. It's really difficult for me, again, without all the elements, to know if we're talking about a couple for which having seven, eight, nine children, is always worth taking. Or, on the contrary, did they reach a limit, from that moment, that necessarily involved enormous economic, human and mental loads —with the war context, the husband's imprisonment, etc.— so that Germaine says: « It's over. Stop. I don't want anymore. I can't anymore ».

**51:47** *Swifts chirping loudly and church bells ringing.*

**51:52 FABRICE CAHEN** Having said that, what happens in the couple interplay is always inevitably mysterious, enigmatic, very difficult to reconstitute.

**52:01** *Deep and heavy percussive sound.*

**52:01 ME *skeptical*** You say: « They didn't have the pill », but the others didn't have seven, eight, nine children.

**JEAN-PAUL** Th-that-that... Dad would have answered: « That's the Latxagues! They are like rabbits! They're everywhere! » And he would start laughing. That's all.

**52:18** *Wall clock starts to ring...*

**52:20 JEAN-PAUL** I don't know.

*...and finishes ringing after seven dongs.*

**52:28 ROGER *outraged*** I don't understand that my father, eighth of eight children, had on his own more children than all his brothers and sisters together. So don't tell me anything about Ogino's method or this or that in that time! What the hell was he thinking about, this man! That's all! And yet, don't ever speak ill of him to me!

**52:53** *Heavy mineral sound rubbing and swifts singing.*

**52:58 NARRATOR** Behind Germaine's story, there's also Joseph's responsibility. Something I can finally assure. If she accomplished this abortion by herself and suffered its fatal outcome, it's most likely because she did it without Joseph knowing, because she didn't think she could count on him and probably was afraid of him, like her children after her.

**53:22** *Heavy mineral sound banging.*

**NARRATOR** This is, without a doubt, the hidden face of the unspoken about Germaine's death.

*Heavy mineral sound banging faster and louder.*

**NARRATOR** The secret inside the secret, and that was yet visible in the eyes of the world.

*Climax and end of the mineral sound.*

- 53:40 NARRATOR** Her children are able, today, to ask themselves questions despite their loyalty to this feared and respected father who never got married again and spared them the orphanage.
- 53:52 MADO** Dad did what he could. He bent over backwards during the war so that we lacked nothing. Food wise, it was his big argument: « You never lacked nothing! » So the importance of meals marked all of us.
- 54:06 MICHEL** I remember these Sunday meals. It was animated —but you didn't fool around with the patriarch! When we spoke too loud, he made us shut up. And he didn't need to stand up to calm us down.
- 54:22 JEAN-PAUL** I won't judge him. He was like he was. But for us he was a very good guy too. For Mum, I don't know. Because, you see, eight children, maybe nine pregnancies —I don't know how many times she got pregnant in sixteen years —he wouldn't take much precautions. That's my point of view.
- 54:50 MADO** He probably had a high level of sexual demand. *Outraged* But what I ask myself is —you see— with the busy days she had, when she finally got to bed, imagine she had to go through *that*, too ?! Well... it-it-it could wait. But I think that if *he* needed it, she didn't have her say in the matter. Today people call it « rape » or something but...
- 55:26 JEAN-PAUL** I find excuses for him, in a way, but he certainly wasn't the gentle type. No, he wasn't.  
**ME** And do you think he became tougher with you all after Germaine died or was he like that before?  
**JEAN-PAUL** He was... You see... I was ten when Mum died. I...I... —how can I say?— personally, I don't know how it worked, I wasn't in the intimacy of their room. In front of us, I never saw any scene between them.
- 56:06 MIREILLE** I saw my grandfather in tears saying to me: « You know, Mireille, the only thing I am waiting for is to be reunited with your grandmother ». I interpreted it in a certain way so I felt moved because he was talking about his wife and that, finally, at this moment, all he was waiting for was to be reunited with her. If you don't know the other part of the story... Maybe he, too, was in denial of what he had inflicted on her.
- 56:36** *Blackbird singing.*
- 56:42 MADO** I also think that Mum's death must have weighed a lot on his conscience. In my opinion, it was time that he asked himself questions —but it was too late. He did all, all that he could, but he could have done otherwise.
- 57:16** *Piano playing the traditional Basque song « Haurrak ikasazue ».*
- 57:19 NARRATOR** The Latxagues get together in family reunions about every two years. It brings together about fifty people.
- 57:27** *Indistinct chatter during a family reunion.*
- 57:29 NARRATOR** Everybody has heard stories about Grandpa Joseph, who always had the last word and was respected in the district. We thought that we had forgotten Germaine, but she's still here, through her children's memories. Her name can resonate again on the branches of the family tree.
- 57:58 CREDITS** This was *Germaine or the unspoken*. A documentary directed by Claire Latxague and supported by Transmission collective.

- 58:06** **MY COUSIN ODILE** Claire! Is uncle Bernard coming tomorrow?  
**ME** Yes-yes.  
**MY COUSIN ODILE** Ah! With Claudine?  
**ME** Yes.  
**MY COUSIN ODILE** Very good.
- 58:14** **CREDITS** With the voices and testimonies of Roger, Anita, Denise, Jean-Paul, Mado, Odile, Delphine, Agnès, Cécile, Michel, Bernard, Claudine, Francis, Josette, Cisot, Mireille and Ruben, and also the kind contribution of Fabrice Cahen.
- 58:43** Mixing: Pierre Chaffanjon.
- 58:46** Thanks to Juan Carlos Lorenzo for his interpretation of Gabriel Olaizola's lullaby, « *Aurtxo seaskan* ».
- 58:56** This work received the « Brouillon d'un rêve sonore » [« Draft of a sound dream »] grant from the Scam [Société civile des auteurs multimédia/Civil society of multimedia authors] and was supported by Phonurgia nova, the Groupe Musiques Vivantes de Lyon [Group of Living Musics from Lyon city] and the Valence Scenario Festival.
- 59:09** Thanks to everyone who lend an attentive and enthusiastic ear and also to those who participated to this project, in particular to Alice Audrezet, Péroline Barbet, Mona Clavel, Jean Desauw, Charlie Dupiot, Valérie Ganne, Armelle Girinon, Muriel KS, Julien Lagier, Sarah Lefèvre, Caroline Mas, Kaye Mortley, Sébastien Ollivier, Laura Raim, Manuela Santa Marina, Jean-Basile Sosa, Diana Trujillo and Amélie Tulet.
- 59:48** Thanks to all my family and to Alex and Ruben for their patience and their support.
- 59:54** *Blackbird singing.*

This documentary is dedicated to the memory of Roger, André and Josette, and to all the Germaines.