

INTERVIEW WITH ALINE MONNET RAMSAY

AT SAN RAPHAEL, CALIFORNIA

ON 6 SEPTEMBER 1991

AR: "I had no notion as child or as a young woman of how important Jean would become.

"He and Gorbachev may be the two most important people of the 20th century."

"He never wanted to be in the forefront, he was a kind of "eminence grise."

"What is surprising is that he came from such a simple background."

"His father came from a peasant background.."

"I remember grandpere...there seemed nothing extraordinary about the old man. And yet he passed on remarkable genes, it seems."

"Did you know that he (J.M.) narrowly missed sailing on the Titanic?"

He was absolutely furious that he could not go, according to his sister, Mme. Chaumet. Had he gone, there would have been no common market."

"My grandfather always talked about Charente...he was not very much of a churchgoer. My aunt (Jean's younger sister, Marie Louise) was nearly a fanatic."

AR: "My sister Colette would know far more (about JM) than I. She has lived in Rouen since the year Algiers seceded from France.. She has had far more occasion to see him (JM) than I had."

"She leads a very retired life but I think that she's the one to talk with. She has a daughter and granddaughter from a previous marriage.

"Then there is was the Chaumet scandal...you are familiar with that? "You remember that jewelry scandal in Paris in 1987?

"You see, Mme. Chaumet was Jean Monnet's sister.

"Jacques & Pierre Chaumet (her sons) did all those things.

"I'm not ready to judge these things. But it did seem reprehensible to me.

"There is a daughter too, Therese. She is my first cousin. She lives in Lyon, married to Joseph Payen of the 'silk' family. Her marriage, incidentally, was arranged by my aunt Marie Louise.) She (Therese) would know a lot about him (JM) too. She never left France as my sister and I had done. She would know know all about him and the family.

AR: "By the way, has anyone spoken to Marianne?"

LT: "I don't know. I have heard, second hand, that Marianne is very protective, not at all forthcoming about sharing memories of her father."

AR: "I do not know why she should be so protective. There are no skeletons in the family closet as far as I know. And there are many nice things to be said about J.M. I have actually had very little contact with Marianne. She was always very independent. The last time I saw her was in the early 60's. My sister Colette maintains a friendly relationship with Marianne.

"My closest tie with the family was with my aunt, Mme. Chaumet, who died in March, 1986. She was married to Marcel Chaumet, a jeweler of 'great repute' who had his place on the Place Vendome next to the Morgan Guaranty Bank.

"Then there was this tragedy (AR refers again to the 'jewelry scandal'

which rocked the Giscard regime) but that is neither here nor there."

(AR doesn't think that JM's nephews Jaques & Pierre -- Mme. Chaumet's sons -- will be of much help to an interviewer because their time will be taken up by a law suit scheduled to come up in September this year.

The suit had been postponed many times since the scandal in the summer of 1987.

There are five nephews and nieces in all. Mrs. Ramsay has two sons. She talks frequently to Therese and to her sister by telephone. The next time she speaks to them she will tell them about M. Duchene who may be calling them in connection with a book he is writing about JM.

She has a copy of Fontaine's Memoirs of JM but hasn't yet read it although her husband has done so. She has, however, read and enjoyed several of Fontaine's historical novels.)

AR: "I don't think that Jean had time to be a very attentive father. He was away so much. He never had the time.

"My father died in 1927. I was ten. My sister was eight. We were living in Paris. Jean became our guardian. He was not a very

good guardian but he did the best he could -- he just never had the time. He would sometimes tell me to 'do this' or to 'do that.' Sometimes I would say 'no, I won't.'"

LT: "You say your father died in 1927? Monnet was in New York by then, was he not?"

AR: "That's possible."

"Anyway, when my father died, he had left debts which Jean covered. I had that from my aunt, Mme. Chaumet, and from my mother who died in 1967."

LT: "Francois Fontaine, in his essay about Monnet, suggests that Gaston was recognized as the 'intellectual' of the two sons -- thus to be considered for a university education whereas Jean, the 'practical one,' was to take over the family business."

AR: "That's what I'd been told by my aunt...that Jean was destined to take charge of the firm. She was the 'horse's mouth' as far as my father's family was concerned. She lived through all of that period. I really don't know if my father had a university education. Anyway, he went into the export-import business with Germany after World War I."

Jean knew English, my father knew German. My mother was a Swede -- from a Swedish family in Finland. Her father owned very valuable real estate in Helsingfors (Helsinki) and was a well-to-do businessman.

"My father died of appendicitis in three days. There was no penicillin in those times."

"Jean was very generous to us after my father died. But he

said that it was too expensive for us to live in Paris. So eventually, we moved (in '31) to Finland where my mother's parents took us in."

(AR married a Swede from Finland's Swedish minority before WWII. whose name was Baron Constantine Ramsay. The family members are direct descendants of a Scotsman, Ian Ramsay, who fought with the King of Sweden in the late 15 hundreds. He was consequently given a large land grant in Finland which, in those days, was a part of Sweden.)

AR: "I remained very close to my aunt. We would go back almost every year to Paris and I would spend at least two weeks with her each time. She told me all about the family and what was going on. She was a remarkable woman with a strong mind and strong will.

"You know the maiden sister, Marie-Louise, had a lot to do with the Catholic church. She eventually went to live in Rome."

LT: "So as a child and when you were growing up you saw very little of uncle Jean?"

AR: "Quite right. he was always gone -- in China, in America -- all that chronology -- I really don't know." But on the whole, I saw more of him then than in the latter years.

LT: "Later did you ever visit Jean and Silvia in Houjarray?"

AS: "Many times -- it was a charming old farm house. It always seemed in winter to be bitterly cold inside. I remember we were there one Christmastime. It might have been 1945, when we were there. Marianne was there too, I recall."

LT: "Did you ever meet Anna?"

AR: "Once or twice. I never really knew her. I did hear that she was very 'liberal' in her political views.

LT: "She was Anna Giannini?"

AS: "Yes, that was the name of Silvia's first husband, Anna's father."

LT: "What was the connection between the Bank of America's Giannini and Silvia's husband?"

AR: "I don't know if there was any connection. Giannini, as far as I know, is a common name in Italy.

"The granddaughter of the Bank of America's Giannini in San Francisco, is a friend of mine. I would ask her about her grandfather's relationship with Monnet but the poor woman has been in a bad accident and has partially lost her memory.

"I want to say that what is most clear of my recollection of Jean (he asked me not to call him "Uncle Jean" but just "Jean.") was his ability to look for and discover the most fundamental part of a problem. He was a very good listener.

"I remember the Avenue Foch office. We went there once or twice to see him when we (M. & Mme. Ramsay) were in Paris. He was always very busy on those occasions.

"You know there was something 'oriental' about him.

"His mother was a very beautiful woman. Even in her old age, she was striking. When I was a small girl, I recall her walking in her rose garden, erect, dressed in black, swinging her hips like a young girl.

"I used to wonder where Jean got these wonderful sparkling eyes."

"Those eyes and his slightly oriental look came from his grandmother, Mme. Demelle.

LT: "How did your side of the family feel about Jean not taking over the helm of the family's business as had been expected?"

AR: "My mother was very pretty and very spoiled by her father. She did not want to live in Cognac -- and I don't blame her -- insisting that they live in Paris. That's when my father went into business with Germany (he had a German partner who, during the German occupation, became an acting commandant of Paris).

"In that business debts mounted, debts which Jean very kindly -- 'generously' is actually the word -- took over.

"From then on it was my first cousin, Robert, who took over the Monnet firm. My grandfather Jean Gabriel Monnet was alive then. He was very kind to my sister and myself. Unfortunately he had a reputation of having a bad disposition -- of being authoritarian. He was an energetic man -- a very small man. He was like mercury -- all over the place. He loved good food and, in spite of that, was always thin.

"There were so many small growers in Charente who couldn't afford to sell their brandy separately, that Jean Gabriel started a growers' cooperative. I thought it was very successful.

"George Monnet, a first cousin of my father and brother of Robert, was a representative of the Monnet interests in the US and Canada for many years. He was a delightful and amusing man but a little bit of a happy-go-lucky person. Whereas my father's other first cousin, Robert, was a very well-organized man who took over

and ran the company until it was sold to a German firm."

LT: "Was there an impression in your own family that Jean made a lot of money?"

AR: "I really can't answer that. I can say that he was generous with us after my father died. He not only took care of his debts but he also sent us a monthly sum for my mother and my sister and I. Under the circumstances he did about as much as he was able to do.

My mother would sometimes be irritated with him because the payments occasionally came late. But that was generally the fault of his secretary who handled the payments.

"He had a nice smile. I liked him. He talked in a gentle way. He was un-French in that he talked slowly --he did not rush his speech as the Frenchman often does. He allowed time for what he had to say to sink in.

"I remember the first time that he brought Silvia to Cognac. It so happened that my sister and I were there. I can still see her. She was all in white. And I think she must have been wearing a white cape.

"She was taller than Jean. She was dark, Italian, and very elegant.

"And I also remember that consternation reigned because they (the parents) were extremely upset that he would want to marry a divorced lady.

"And I am sure that the fact that they were legally married in Russia, of all places, did not sit well with the parents either.

"But my grandmother, a severe and proud person -- though obviously unhappy with the situation -- took it gracefully. She never commented upon it. (She became very deaf in her fifties -- owing to an ear infection, I believe. This may have made her even more reserved.) Yet she always radiated great kindness and concern for her family.

"Jean had his own place outside of Cognac called 'L'Echassier' where he used to go when he came to visit. It was in a pretty place on the Charente. Then when Jean no longer had time for it, Robert bought it from him. I visited Robert there. "Then he (JM) had a beautiful apartment in Paris on the rue de Conde where I went to visit him when I was 11 or 12 years old.

It was in the old part of Paris, on the left bank, close to the Boulevard St. Germain. He had a cook and butler. The cook was fantastic. The meals were wonderful. In later years, when he would come to Mme. Chaumet's for lunch, he would be very frugal -- eating only a bit of cold ham and some salad.

AR: "About Kreuger: I had no idea that Jean had anything to do with helping settle the U.S. affairs of Kreuger after his death. He was a friend of my mother. During 1918-19 when my father was at some "Commisson Interalliee" in Stockholm, Kreuger lent us his apartment there.

"Jean had a strong streak of optimism -- this came out when dealing with family affairs. He would always say: 'it will all come out all right.'"

LT: "Do you enjoy living out here in California?"

AR: "No, I don't like living here. It is not my choice. I would prefer a cold climate. My Scandinavian background makes me prefer the northland -- such as Canada. I have always felt slightly in exile.

Here, I have never had a feeling of well-being. I do feel at home in Paris and in Scandinavia."

(Business interests brought Aline Ramsay's husband to California in 1946. In 1949 he bought a large vineyard in the Napa Valley.)

(The foregoing is the first of a two-part interview)

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2ND INTERVIEW WITH ALINE MONNET RAMSAY
ON SEPTEMBER 21, 1991 IN SAN RAPHAEL, CA.

LT Let's go back and have another look at your recollections of your grandmother and grandfather -- something which you discussed in our first interview.

You intimated that Jean's mother who was a very beautiful and self-possessed woman probably came from a better social background than his father.

AR I think so. Incidentally, Jean's round face and slightly slanted eyes seem to have come from his mother's mother, according to pictures I have seen. His grandmother, Mme. Demel, always appeared on the scene dressed in black as though she belonged to some religious order -- which of course she did not. After they reached a certain age, that is the way women in Cognac dressed in those days.

AR Their house was in the center of town. It was big -- a kind of large "mausoleum." But it was not as large as the nearby house of the Martells who were the biggest brandy makers. The Monnet house was two-storied. There was also a large attic -- really a third floor -- where they stored apples in winter. A big garden was in front and there was a kind of grotto -- artificial, of course -- through which my grandfather used to pass in going from the house to a large courtyard and building which housed the (brandy-growers) cooperative organization.

I thought that the Monnet house was furnished in a very ugly manner. Everything was heavy and in dark colors except for the "garden room" which was a kind of enclosed terrace. It was

furnished with green wicker furniture covered with chintz.

And Then there was the salon which was opened only on special occasions such as when the priest came to visit. Otherwise it was almost always closed.

There was a huge hall which spanned nearly the entire width of the house. It was in black and white marble. It was big enough so that my sister and I to ride our bicycles around in it.

LT Was there a large country kitchen?

AR Oh yes. There was an enormous kitchen with a black and white marble floor. As far back as I can remember, my grandfather had a fantastic cook whose name Helene. The food was not chic restaurant food but wonderful home-cooked, country food. I have never tasted poulet saute sec the way she prepared it.

LT In those days did you or they ever dine in the kitchen?

AR My heavens, no. Why we were hardly allowed to go into the kitchen. I used to sneak in there because I liked Helene. She was a large woman. She must have had a hip problem because she limped. And she had to cover a lot of territory in that big kitchen.

LT Did Mme. Monnet do any gardening herself? No, she did not. But she loved to go into the garden and look at the flowers. She was particulally fond of roses. They had a vegetable garden too.

It was a sad house for me. But then, I was a child. I came there after my father's death. I must have linked by father's death with that house.

LT Did you go down there with your mother soon after your father's death?

AR My mother did not like the place. But my sister and I would go there. We spent an entire school year there between 1930 and '31. After that we went back to Finland with our mother and stayed there for good.

AR The school was run by a religious order. It was a convent school for girls. It was very strict. I was rebellious. I just didn't like it. My sister however was impressed by it.

Marie Louise (JM's sister) and Mme. Chaumet both went there.

It was a difficult time. I think I mentioned that my had father died leaving quite a few debts.

LT You were aware of this then?

AR Oh yes I was.

It was at that time that Jean said that we could no longer afford to live in our apartment in Paris and that we would have to move into a smaller one. Faced with that choice, my mother decided that it would be better to go back to her parents in Finland. It was during that interim period before we left that my sister and I went down to Cognac to go to school.

We went to Finland in '31 -- in the summer.

I loved my maternal grandfather in whose house we lived. Unfortunately he died three years after we came there. There were a lot of deaths in that family.

LT Let's go back to those visits of yours -- you must have been quite young -- to Uncle Jean's Paris apartment in the rue de Conde.

AR I don't remember whether it was a house or an apartment. I seem, to recall that it had three levels. Jean had wanted to cut a staircase between two of the floors. And when the workmen did that they discovered that the ceiling had been originally hand-painted. Jean was quite excited by this. It was a very beautiful apartment. It must have been in '28 or '29 when I was there.

LT Very few people to whom I've talked recalled much about the various places where Monnet lived when he was in Paris and, for that matter, when he lived in the U.S. -- particularly in the late 20's and early '30's.

Harold Nicholson's biography of Dwight Morrow mentions that Morrow and Monnet (who were good friends) lived not far from each other outside of New York City in a New Jersey town on the Hudson River palisades. Mary Harrison (whom you know) told me that as a young woman in the 1920's she paid visits to Monnet with her father, an international business pioneer who sold telephone equipment abroad. His lawyer-associate in France was Rene Pleven through whom he came to know Monnet. They visited him in Paris and in the U.S. She could not recall where, in Paris, they went to see Monnet but did remember weekends at Monnet's country house (which she thought was in Connecticut) where she said, there were "many pretty young women."

She was also struck, as were you, by Monnet's eyes. She confesses that, at her young, impressionable age, she was much taken by Monnet.

Can you remember any other places in Paris where Jean lived?

AR No, I can't. I do remember very clearly his place in Cognac which I have mentioned. It was pleasantly-situated on the bank of the Charente river. He used to stay there when he didn't want to live in the big house in town. He didn't stay there very much because he was abroad so frequently.. Eventually, after he married Silvia, he gave it up and, as I've mentioned, then his cousin, Robert Monnet, took it over.

LT Did Jean ever go fishing in the Charente as his father had done?

AR I don't know. As far as I know the only thing that he loved to do was to walk. I remember when he was at Houjarray he would walk every day. He wore special clothes for his walks which made him look, to me, like a tramp. He normally was always very soignee -- that is, nattily dressed. You know he had his clothes made in London.

LT You were born in Helsingfors?

AR Yes. But I could have been born in Russia. After the war, we went from Helsingfors to Stockholm where my father served as a member of something called the Conseil Interallie.

From there we went on to Paris in 1920 which is where my sister was born.

LT Where was your house in Paris?

AR Actually we had an apartment -- a very big apartment which was very nice. It was at 51 rue de la Tour. We were near to the Bois de Boulogne. That's the place where we lived in Paris that I remember

best. My father traveled a good deal -- mainly to Germany for his export-import business. He had a German business partner named Westrick who spoke excellent French. He, by the way, became one of the acting commandants of Paris during the occupation in World War II.

When my father died, the world changed for us. I shall never forget my grandfather's grief. He was terribly upset. The others were very reserved. In fact the whole Monnet family seemed to share a quality of reserve.

LT Going now from your grandparents back to Jean, what were your early recollections of him?

AR He used to blow in and out of Paris -- very briefly. But I really only remember him clearly after my father's death. I don't think though that the two brothers ever had any kind of disagreement.

LT Do you recall any remarks that your father made about his brother?

AR No I don't.

LT So your father was a reserved man too?

AR Yes. My mother, a golden blond china doll, blue-eyed Scandinavian, was was somewhat of a flibberty-gibbit. I suspect that she was one of the reasons for all of the debts that were left after my father died. She had been very spoiled by her father and expected to live at a certain level which we could not afford. Jean once visited us in Finland after we left Paris. We had a little villa outside Helsingfors in the summer months. I recall

that when he came to visit he was tremendously relaxed. He laughed a lot. He was in an extraordinarily gay mood.

LT Did he come just to visit you?

AR Oh it's possible he had some business in Russia or Sweden.

LT Do recall what year that was?

AR It could have been '36 or '37. I have seen a photograph of him taken then. He wore a very sportative outfit -- it looked like a kind of jumpsuit, very informal. I recall nothing but a pleasant and happy mood during that visit -- probably in late July or early August.

I have another recollection of a time when I saw him in London. That was in '36. I was there to learn better English. I was staying with a nice lady who took in three or four young women. She was supposed to chaperone us and also help us meet nice people. I took some English courses at a London college. There was an American girl in the group. I recall we were all greatly impressed when one of the Roosevelt sons called one evening to take her out. Anyway, Jean came to London. He called me and asked me to go out to dinner with him. I, of course, was thrilled. I put on a long dress and went to meet him at the Hyde Park Hotel where he was staying. We had dinner there, just the two of us.

There was another time, when I flew with Jean from London to Paris in '36. As soon as we were airborne, he fell asleep next to me. We were in a single-engined plane. He was like other people with great energy who seem to have the gift of being able to fall asleep for ten minutes and wake up refreshed and alert.

From Paris I went down to Cognac. I must have been 19 years old then. A rather amusing incident occurred there. A man by the name of Alexander deBondi who was Silvia's younger brother figures in this story. My grandfather summoned me into his office. He looked at me, hemmed and hawed, and finally said:: "your uncle Jean, your aunt Marie-Louise, and I think it would be a very good idea if you were to marry Alexander diBondi." I looked at him and said: "but what are you saying?" He said: "well, after all it's aunt Silvia's brother. Besides, you have no dowry."

I said: "yes, I know that."

LT He must have been a lot older than you.

AR I don't know. After all, Silvia was 20 years younger than Jean. But yes, I'm sure he was much older.

Anyway, I did not like being told what to do. I said to my grandfather: "this is absolutely out of the question."

Then I added: "why don't you marry off Marie-Louise to him"

He looked at me and said: "That's all right you don't have to do it. You can go back to your grandmother now."

You know I don't think I ever met Alexander. I heard about him. It would have been interesting to find out what kind of a man he was.

LT You told me earlier than you met Jean and Silvia in Cognac just after they were married.

AR No, that was in '31 when Colette and I were in the convent school. They were married in Russia in '34.

Of all the members of the family it was Marie-Louise who most strongly supported Jean's marriage to Silvia. She, as I have said, was very close to Jean. She had some of his characteristics too. She was very bright and had a well-ordered mind. And she had a marvelous sense of humour. Jean and Marie-Louise were both soul-mates and brain-mates.

LT So the Church won a remarkable woman who had brains as well as passion.

AR Yes, that is true. And when she lived in Rome, she knew all the popes.

The rest of the family was distressed with Jean's marriage because Silvia was not only a divorced woman but she had a child from her first marriage.

LT Did Jean ever talk to you about his early adventures in the United States and in Canada?

AR No, he never did.

He used to write to us from various parts of the world. I remember that people working in a local postoffice in Helsingfors were very excited once by a letter he had sent to us. It was not the fact that it came from Jean Monnet whom they'd never heard of but the fact that it was postmarked Shanghai.

AR I was married in 1942 in Finland.

LT That was a dangerous time.

AR We had no air raid alarm on the day of our marriage. The Russians were bad flyers. Bad weather and a jagged uneven coastline combined against the Russians so that most of their bombs would

fall harmlessly into the sea.

The next time I saw Jean was the year 1954 when Therese Chaumet was married to Joseph Payen. Jean and I had a superficial relationship throughout. It may have been the result of not seeing him frequently enough. I always had the feeling that Jean, when he was with me, was thinking of something else. That is not very inspiring or confidence-building for a young person. He decided at one time that I looked like a "mongoose" and that, subsequently, is what he often called me. I have mentioned that he was always very generous financially but, as our guardian, was always too busy to give my sister or me much personal attention.

Of course, I never realized until much later to what extent he was involved in world affairs. I understand now that he had a vocation to do something which was very important for him and which turned out to be very important for the rest of the world and to do this he had to pursue things with a one-track mind.

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NOTE: The following is the text of a handwritten note (dated Nov. 10, 1991) from Mme. Ramsay which she describes as a "postscriptum." It accompanied the above text on which she had written corrections and amendments.

"I think that my grandfather, Jean's father, was born in a very small village called "Cherves" -- or at least close to it. His father's father was mayor of Cherves. It might be worthwhile to look into the church records (or other documents) in the village

for further antecedents of the Monnet family. Jean's father took my sister and me many times to the (family) farmhouse near Cherves called "Malbati." It was a typical peasant farm structure, U-shaped, built of gray stone. Chickens and pigs ran about in a very muddy courtyard. A beautiful rooster perched atop the manure heap. A rustic couple lived there as caretakers. In the courtyard was a large cherry tree, low enough for my sister and me to climb and sit amongst the branches, feasting upon cherries. The tree was very old and it is possible that Jean in his childhood may have climbed it and enjoyed eating the cherries too.

"I should also mention that my sister Colette Autigeon was a beautiful child, a blond with Jean's mother's very dark brown eyes. She grew up to be a beautiful woman.

"Jean was very health-conscious as I remember him from the '50's and '60's. He was most abstemious and careful of his diet in spite of all of the good food that he'd become accustomed to. I recall he told me to follow his example and gargle each morning with weak saline solution and also to snuff it up into the nose to prevent colds. I did so with good results."

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