

# OBITUARY



Madame Claudine Portmann has recently left us. Born Claudine Barreau, in 1923, at the costal village where she died on January 21, 2008; at home and surrounded by her family, Madame Portmann was a role model of simplicity and modesty.

This small village was her favorite place, from her beach house she patiently admired the movement of the tides, read her books, studied, and she loved to have family and friends around her.

She studied Medicine in Bordeaux, and was mostly interested in pediatrics. Through the influence of her fiancé then, Michel Portmann (whom she married in 1948) she moved to a branch of Medicine that was brand new and exciting at the time: hearing loss in children and its consequence. She was board-certified in Otorhinolaryngology with a thesis about Congenital Hearing Loss Caused by Rubella in the Mother; since the early 50's she was a tireless fighter on behalf of children with hearing disabilities.

In 1952 she helped build the Regional Audiology Center at the University of Bordeaux, the Experimental Audiology Laboratory and the Language and Hearing Center, all in that region.

In 1953, together with her husband, she published the *Precis d'Audiometrie Clinique* which was published nine more times and published in numerous languages, including Portuguese, which still is paramount reading for those interested in Audiology. In 1956, together with Prof. Michel Portmann she founded the second School of Speech and Hearing Therapy in France, one year after the one founded in Paris.

Numerous specialists, Otorhinolaryngologists, pediatricians, speech and hearing therapists, teachers of hearing impaired people and hearing aid fitters, went to Bordeaux to visit her office and exchange experiences with this wonderful person: her dynamic personality, ethics, selflessness, her discipline and the enormous care she gave to the little hearing impaired and his/her parents were an example for those who shared with Claudine her professional activities.

The fruits of this tireless mission made her worldly famous, and she traveled around the globe, to the Americas, Asia and Europe to teach courses and give practical demonstrations. On one of her first visits to South America, she went to São Paulo, in 1974 for the first International Congress of the Georges Portmann Institut, presided by a loyal friend of the Portmann Family, Dr. Alexandre Medicis da Silveira.

Her professional duties did not interfere with her family life, she was an exemplary wife and mother, understanding and compassionate, keeping at all times a relationship of deep friendship with her children Annie, Nathalie and Didier. The world and habits have changed much, but not enough to prevent Claudine from talking in equal

terms with her eight dear granddaughters, and understand them. Her understanding of the world may have made her a pioneer in globalization, because for many years she received foreign students from all the continents, and she treated them the same way, with the same concerns. Every Wednesday, the Portmann couple invited one or two of their students for lunch. Time may have been little, but the student would come, drink some Port or some Whisky, sit at the table and eat well. Claudine was always very interested in asking how that foreign student was getting along, what were his/her difficulties, and she would ask "What can I do to help you?" After coffee, Claudine always used an expression that we will never forget, one that was mentioned in the posthumous homage paid her by one of her granddaughters: "bon, bon, bon!!!!" that upon arrival could mean: "It is so good to see you, how are things going?" And upon leaving it certainly meant: "Let's go, let's go, it is time to work... our duties are waiting"!!!!

I had the privilege of meeting this remarkable person. I was most impressed by her sincerity: with Claudine there was no reading between the lines. Her objectiveness and love for her friends captivated me. I had the honor of spending time with the Portmann's, when my family and I only received love and lessons for life. At the hospital, with Michel Negrevergne we worked in the room adjacent to Claudine's, and just like Negrevergne, I learned to love and admire Madame Portmann.

With her loss many other orphans are left: those hearing disabled children - many of them are adults today, who frequently wrote Madame Portmann telling her about their lives (and they were always answered), Delaroche (her assistant, friend and follower), and also all of us, who learned so much from her.

To Master Michel Portmann, their children Annie, Nathalie and Didier, and their lovely eight granddaughters, we send the condolence from us and all those Brazilians who are concerned with the hearing impaired children.

At the end, I would like to quote a prayer offered by Monique Delaroche in the *Revue de Laringologie*:

"On behalf of all the professionals who had the opportunity of benefiting from her teachings,  
On behalf of everyone who had the opportunity and the honor of working with her,  
On behalf of all the children she treated and followed,  
On behalf of all the families she helped, guided and encouraged.

We say thank you  
Thank you for accomplishing your mission  
Thank you for your life of serving others".

*Prof. José Alexandre Medicis da Silveira*