

For Klarsfeld, Hunter of Barbie, Chase Nears Its End

By Julian Nundy

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LYON — When the trial of Klaus Barbie opened Monday, a middle-aged lawyer took his seat in a French court for the first time.

But while he may be a novice in the courtroom, his name has become a household name because of his work tracking down Nazi war criminals.

The lawyer is Serge Klarsfeld, whose German wife, Beate, drew attention to Barbie and traced him to Bolivia, where he lived in exile, in 1971.

Mr. Klarsfeld, 52, who initially studied history, took a law degree in 1974 to be able to plead on behalf of Jewish victims in war crimes cases.

Mr. Klarsfeld, born in Bucharest, did not join the fight to seek out war criminals until 1965.

• In that year, Mr. Klarsfeld made "a pilgrimage" to Auschwitz concentration camp. His father had died in the camp after the Gestapo rounded up Jews in Nice, where the family had moved, in 1943.

Mr. Klarsfeld says that were it not for the activism of his wife, who is not Jewish, he would not have become a militant.

In her most famous battle, Mrs. Klarsfeld found where Barbie was living and, in 1972, chained herself to a bench in La Paz with the mother of two children who had died in Auschwitz.

A poster held by the two women proclaimed "Altmann - Barbie," unmasking Barbie's alias under which he had obtained Bolivian nationality. The poster was ripped up by plainclothes security agents.

"It was her battle, as a German," Mr. Klarsfeld says. "Without Beate, this German, I should never have become a militant Jew."

During the La Paz demonstration, Mrs. Klarsfeld said, a Bolivian woman, carrying a baby on her back, said: "There is no justice in Bolivia. Kidnap him or kill him."



Lionel Cironneau/The Associated Press

Serge Klarsfeld, center, at the site in Izieu from which 44 Jewish children were deported.

At the end of 1972, Mr. Klarsfeld took the advice and set out to kidnap Barbie.

Joined by Regis Debray, a one-time revolutionary who has since become an adviser to President Francois Mitterrand, Mr. Klarsfeld flew to Chile, then governed by Salvador Allende, to organize Barbie's abduction.

They were joined by two Bolivian opponents of the rightist government of Hugo Banzer Suarez, one of whom was Gustavo Sanchez Salazar, who supervised Barbie's expulsion from Bolivia in 1983 as under secretary of the interior. Mr. Sanchez, who is due to testify in the Barbie trial this week, was later

appointed interior minister.

The kidnap plot failed after the Bolivian authorities jailed Barbie pending an unsuccessful extradition procedure in March 1973.

Since beginning his campaign, Mr. Klarsfeld has become a leading authority and writer on the treatment of Jews by the Nazi occupiers and by the collaborationist Vichy government of World War II.

In the Barbie trial, Mr. Klarsfeld is one of 40 lawyers representing more than 100 civil plaintiffs.

His main dossier concerns the alleged dispatch by Barbie of 44 Jewish children from a children's home in the village of Izieu to their deaths in Auschwitz in April 1944.