

-TITLE- CHRISTINE HILSUM, WITH HUSBAND

-I_DATE- 4/7/91

-SOURCE- CHRISTIAN RESCUERS PROJECT

-RESTRICTIONS-

-SOUND_QUALITY- FAIR

-IMAGE_QUALITY- GOOD

-DURATION-

-LANGUAGES-

-KEY_SEGMENT-

-GEOGRAPHIC_NAME-

-PERSONAL_NAME-

-CORPORATE_NAME-

-KEY_WORDS-

-NOTES-

-CONTENTS-

QUESTION: What year where you born?

ANSWER: 1910.

Q: Where are you from?

A: I was born in Enschede (ph?), a small town in eastern Holland,
close to the German border. Then my family moved to too bigger villages.

Q: Where there any Jewish people in these towns?

A: There must have been but I never noticed any distinction between Jews and other people. I had Jewish friends without being aware of any difference about them. Religion didn't matter in my family. My parents told me it didn't matter to them. For some people it became an issue because of marriage but that was not the case in my home.

Q: What religion were your parents?

A: My mother and father were both Protestants. But my mother didn't impose religion on her children. She didn't believe that people necessarily had to belong to a religion or that God would punish those who didn't go to church. When I was nineteen my mother died of cancer. My little sister was only nine at the time. I was very close to my mother and I still quote her every day. Shortly after her death I spent eighteen months in England.

Q: What was your father like?

A: My father was a very kind man. His family was descended from the old Fresian (ph) nobility.

0:15:0/0812.

In 1933 I married my husband but I remember knowing about the nazis

in 1927 because my mother's sister had married a German - a German,

not a Nazi. We had heard something about riots in Germany and about

the Germans wanting revenge for losing the war. We also heard about anti-Semitism and slurs against Jews. Also inflation was terrible...people had to go to the bank twice a day. (Mrs. Hilsum's

husband adds this last comment) People's money was not worth anything.

Q: That was in the twenties?

A: Yes. The Germans didn't like the Dutch. They called us cheese heads and thought that we were all rich. My husband was schooled in

Amsterdam and held several jobs there.

There he got the feeling that the Dutch didn't think much of the German's either.

Q: How did you meet your husband?

A: We were both living in Amsterdam and we were both very lonesome.

There was never any objection to our marriage. The fact that I was

to have a Jewish husband was not an issue for my father. I was twenty two and he was twenty five when we were married. After we

were married for a while I went to England and France to work as an au pair for a Jewish family with two little children. The father was Danish and the mother Jewish. At the time I didn't know that they were Jewish. They left for Mexico and I went back home to be with my husband.

At this time the war was getting worse and once back in Holland I wrote letters to officials in my government expressing my concern over the events in Germany that I was hearing of. The government took no notice and things got even worse. After a while it goes too far and you can't control it. It's tragic when no one takes notice of the signs...

Q: Do you see any similarity between today and the time before the War?

A: No. Things were much more quiet. A different world. My husband's father was a doctor and he rode on horseback to visit his patients. But in some ways things are similar because even today the Government ignores the problems that trouble the country. The poor are getting poorer and the rich are getting richer.

Q: Did you get any responses to your letters?

A: The responses to my letters before the war were always "Don't Worry". It was incredible; I received the same line right up until

the night the Germans invaded.

(Husband: I remember seeing Germans in trucks out my window. We could see them because our house was on the main street.)

Yes, that's true. And they didn't even know that they were in Holland. They thought that they were in Poland.

Q: Did you already have children at this point?

A: Yes we did. We have three children. The first was born in 1934,

then 1938, and 1949. I was very scared for my family. I love my children very much and I am especially fond of the youngest. She was a "present" and I consider her "new" because she was not tainted by the War. At the same time that we were so frightened we

knew that a lot of German Jews were still not immediately worried

about the deportations.

0:33:0/1825

It was in 1941 while on a weekend trip that the threat became real.

While we were gone we were sent a message from home warning us not

to return. We were told that the Germans had gone to get the Jews

that worked in my husband's factory. When we got back the Germans

were gathering up the jews and giving them one hours notice. This

time they just took the young men living near the German border but

upon our return the mayor of the village phoned the SS to inform them that my husband was back. He was spared because his status was

different as a Jew in a mixed marriage. They said they'd get him next time. I had to prove my christian blood line. I didn't want to

do it but I has to for the children. So my husband was forced to wear the Jewish star. There was also an eight o'clock curfew imposed and it was decreed that all jews were forbidden all means

of transportation including even a bicycle. My husband had to walk to work every day and back as well. It was a very long distance. Other new anti-semitic laws were enacted. At least the children were not forced to wear stars because they're mother was

christian.

At this time I started visiting all the jews who were confined to

their homes. I would hear the news on the radio and my acquaintance

with someone in the underground also furnished me with news that I

could then circulate to all those in hiding. I was trusted by the

Jews in the community because my husband was Jewish and I had a lot

of Jewish friends for whom I would do things. One of the things I

helped with was the production and distributing of ration cards and

false identification cards for the young Dutch boys who were being

sent to Germany. I also hid Jews and other non Jews who were wanted

by the SS. I hid them in my house. I also had to find three different houses for my mother in law to hide in. But every time she came back to my house. She said she couldn't live without her

family. Finally she gave up and at sixty three she was taken to the

camp. It was terrible. There were new born babies, sick people and

old people. All they wanted was to be able to stay together. It remains as clear as a photograph in my mind. At the first place she

was taken to which was still within the Dutch border, we tried to

prove that she was Christian but it didn't work. After that I had

no idea of her whereabouts.

1:03:00/2500.

Then I started making parcels for members of my husband's family.

These were parcels made for people going to a special camp in Holland that was reserved for prominent Jews. For instance, one of

my husband's relatives who was also of a mixed marriage, was a member of Parliament. He was a protected Jew because he was a prominent person.

During this time my husband was still at home but then it became necessary that we travel to Amsterdam in order to obtain a temporary permit which would allow him to stay at home. There was

a policeman, a Dutch Nazi with whom we had to deal. On the way to

Amsterdam my husband was not allowed to sit on the train. By March

1943 the special permit card was not enough to keep him exempt. He would be deported if he didn't go into hiding. At this time young non-Jews as well as mixed marriage people were put into hiding. The non-Jews were hiding to escape compulsory labor in Germany. The SS were not actively looking for people.

In my house I hid two boys, a whole family, and another Jewish woman whose family had been sent to the concentration camp. My house was especially difficult because of its location on the main

road. It acted as an intermediate station from where people would

stop until safer hiding places became available in the country. Anyone who looked very characteristically Jewish couldn't stay too

long. Of course I always thought that it was impossible to tell who

was who anyway so I found this stupid.

Meanwhile my husband was moving around from house to house himself.

2735. HUSBAND: I remember one very frightening encounter with two

SS officers. I was hiding at this woman's house and one day while

she was out running an errand I saw the SS through the living room

window. I thought that they had seen me inside the house so that when they rang the doorbell I had to let them in order not to seem

suspect. They asked me what I was doing in the house and I replied

that I was a friend of the woman whose house it was. I explained that I had been visiting her and that she had to leave quickly. I

remember it being very cold that day and that was what ended up saving me. Because of the cold I was wearing my coat in the house

when the officers made their inquiry. Seeing my coat convinced them

that I had intentions to leave the woman's home

BACK TO MRS. HILSUM: That night he walked all the way home in the

dark. I was shocked at how close he had come to being taken. After

he went into hiding I took Jews into my house. I could do it because my house was very old and there are places to hide people.

There was no attic. In stead there was a space between the top floor and the roof where people could lie without being discovered.

Q: Why were you willing to do all this?

A: I don't know. It wasn't ever really a decision I made. It just

happened. I just welcomed them, What else could I do? The first people I hid were in their thirties. Later there were younger ones.

Q: Did you hide any children? Where you ever scared?

A: Once I was. With the last people I was hiding . It was terrible.

They had been hiding in a place where arms(fire arms?) were dropped. The SS were looking for these places and the people hiding

there had to leave. They were forced to hide in a haystack. A bucket and some food was all that they were given. They came to me

in February when my husband was hiding in a place that was a long

bicycle ride away. One time on my way to visit him I slid on the ice and broke my leg. I still went to see him though. I had to..

1:13:30/3360.

Q: Can you tell us something about the people you hid?

A: I don't like telling some of their stories because some of the

survivors are still alive and I don't Want to hurt them. There is

one couple with whom I'm still in contact. They never come to Holland.

They were young when they came to hide in my house. They were very

scared and the husband broke down. He couldn't take it. I felt very

bad for him. I never cried during the war though. There was too much to do. Someone had to take care of things like this man who could not stop laughing. I knew that there was something funny going on in his head and luckily I could handle him because I had

some exposure to psychiatry. I was able to understand that he was

just reacting to his fear. I had to feed him because he would not

eat and he didn't want his wife or his two boys to care for him. His behavior was very strange. He walked out onto the balcony naked. He was jumping around and shouting "murderers, murderers! I

want to give up. I want to escape." I had to lock him up because he

was endangering himself and the others in hiding. He would try to

run away and I would have to chase after him on my bicycle. I had

a psychiatrist friend come see him but there was little for anyone

to do. He was acting wild and he escaped . Everyone thought that I

was mad chasing him around. I finally found him in the middle of the country. He told me that he was going to report me to the police for locking him up. Luckily the kind owners of a nearby farm

understood the situation and called a trustworthy policeman to convince the man to go with me. Meanwhile there were bombs exploding in the meadows surrounding us.

We were lucky a second time when the man ran into the police station still accusing me of wanting to lock him up because another

good policeman told him to go back with me . He was not a Nazi but

there were Nazi police in the station and one of them figured out

what was going on. At this point I was sure that everything was lost. This Nazi told me that I would be shot and I replied that it

was my business what I did. He warned me again and I was very scared because I was thinking of the children and all the others in

the house. He came back with information about my family and I and

warned me again. He shouted out that "this man is not an evacuee but a Jew!". At this point the good policeman took me aside and told me that he would help us. I understood that he was offering this favor at a critical time. It was only three weeks before the

liberation and he thought that once the war was over I might return

a favor to him.

1:30:00/4040.

Anyway they took him to a hospital and placed him in a padded cell.

he ran away again, refusing to stay locked up. Somehow we managed.

We knew that the Canadians were near. We were liberated by the English. It took three days.

Q: How were your children affected by all this?

A: They emerged from the war virtually undamaged.

Q: What about yourself? What kind of psychological aftermath have

you experienced?

A: The war is with me every night. During the day I'm distracted with daily responsibilities but at night the war comes back to me.

Q: Why do you think you had the strength to do what you did?

A: It wasn't that much. There were many people who did a lot more.

Q: Were you honored at all?

A: By the Dutch Government but not by Israel. But there is a tree

planted for me there.

Q: Did your children ever say anything to you about the risks you

took during the War?

2:35:00/4343.

A: No but other people did. I was accused by many Dutch of being foolish and endangering the lives of my husband and children.

Q: Do you remember feeling traumatized by the Nuremburg trials?

A: I remember them. I would think about it at night. I started having nightmares in 1972. I was ambivalent about the Nazis coming

home. I don't hate all Germans though. I even think that some tiny

amount of good came out of those years during the war. Eternal

friends were made and trust was built by those who went through it.

I just wish I could have saved my mother in law. She was the only

one I lost. During the war my sister's support was critical. It enabled me to help others. Altruism has always been a feature of my

personality, at times even a weakness. I've brought my own children

up with the same values.

Q: Why did so many people not help?

A: They were scared to death or they were occupied with more urgent

needs like surviving in hard times.

2:20:00

My husband's first years of hiding were awful. He was alone all day

in a tiny space above someone's kitchen and he couldn't make any noise while the housekeeper worked below. It was also incredibly cold. His next hiding place was at a mill in the country which gave

him much more freedom.

Q: Why was he hiding at other houses?

A: It was better that people believed he had been sent to a camp.

Not all the Germans were bad. Many helped Jews across the border.

the Nazis I hated the most were the Dutch ones since they were my

own people.

Q: Are you in touch with any of the people you saved?

A: Yes. With some. One woman told me that after the war,

When she crossed the border, no one was there to meet her. I really

blame the Dutch for this behavior. It happened to others as well and one man has written a book about it.

Q: How many people did you save?

A: Eight were saved and many more went through my house.

.END.