

-TITLE-SEMMY RIEKERK  
-I\_DATE-APRIL 29, 1990  
-SOURCE-CHRISTIAN RESCUERS PROJECT  
-RESTRICTIONS-  
-SOUND\_QUALITY-  
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-DURATION-  
-LANGUAGES-  
-KEY\_SEGMENT-  
-GEOGRAPHIC\_NAME-  
-PERSONAL\_NAME-  
-CORPORATE\_NAME-  
-KEY\_WORDS-  
-NOTES-  
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1:00 Semmy has thought very much about the war. The circumstances take the tone.

2:00 You can't separate time from people.

3:00 Her name is Semmy Riekerk.

4:00 She only uses this name. She doesn't care whether or not this interview is in English. Her father was English but he never really learned it. She thinks her English is funny.

5:00 She was born on February 26, 1916. She's 72. She has one sister who is 2.5 years older. Her family was not really religious. She went to Lutheran school.

6:00 Her mother was Dutch. Her father was Dutch too but he was born in England.

8:00 She doesn't think family religion is important. Her father told her she belonged to the world and not the nation. To live religion is important. She was sixteen when her Dad died.

9:00 Her parents lived religion by helping people when they could. They told her to do what she could do to help others. She has been brought up with the idea that someone is always watching you.

10:00 Always be conscientious of what your doing.

11:00 When she was two years old, she had a 1/2 cent. There was a little boy of three years who was her friend. She wanted to buy a sweet, but this wasn't enough for the both of them.

12:00 The woman in the store was old. Semmy bought something worth two pennies and they ran away. Her mother asked her if this was right so. She went back to the store.

13:00 She explained what happened to the woman. The woman said that since she was so honest she would give her more sweets. Semmy will always remember this, and it has made a rule in her life: if you do something wrong, have courage to go back and admit it, even if the other person doesn't like it.

14:00 You can't always live by the higher tones. She's as bad as everyone else. Her father was a sports teacher. He also owned a little hotel. She was 16 when he died, He was blind.

15:00 Her mother had to keep the family. Semmy had a stepfather. She didn't like him at first. He was one of those persons who wasn't good because he thought about it.

16:00 Before the war, he had two suits until he gave one to his brother.

17:00 He wasn't honest, but if he had something and the other needed it, he'd give it away. Semmy came to respect him.

18:00 After her father's death there were financial ups and downs.

19:00 Her stepfather bought a truck. He gave driving lessons, Semmy can't take someone above her. They worked together. He trusted her.

20:00 There was a time when he was under the truck and she was above him with parts of the motor in hand. He trusted that she wouldn't drop it. she thinks she's a very little part of the things that happened in the war.

21:00 Her first husband was the one who arranged everything To do the things he did, you didn't have to have money. She met her husband with her stepfather. There was an advertisement in the paper-someone wanted to start a Taxi business and needed some money.

22:00 Her stepfather wrote to him. They had a meeting. She was sick in the other room. She was 17 and she heard them talking.

23:00 She interfered in their meeting; this wasn't businesslike. Her husband later told her she was clever. He was still married to his first wife then, although he was going through a divorce.

24:00 They started the taxi business. Semmy was the telephone girl at the time.

25:00 They started with 10-12 people. Many couldn't make it. Her first husband bought them out. He worked 24 hours a day. Now she was engaged. When they finally had started the business, she started going out with him.

26:00 A half a month later he told her he had something to celebrate, his divorce. They went out and after became more involved.

27:00 He couldn't trust anyone but his associates. At night he slept between cars. He told Semmy if you start something, start with 100%. He was 11 years older.

28:00 They married June, 1938. She knew what was happening in Germany, but not exactly. But when she was engaged she worked for German Jews.

29:00 Some things are mixed up in her mind. She can't remember exactly where this Jew was from, But he started a cigar shop and she spoke for him and ran the business in the beginning.

30:00 She also knew they had fled Germany. She heard them talking. She was now 20. When she was young, she knew Jewish people, but not as Jews.

31:00 Most of these Jewish people lived on one side of the beach and the others lived on the other side. She went to school on the Jewish side.

32:00 There was a public school and a Lutheran school. They all would fight during school but later in the afternoon they would play together.

33:00 The Jews had a special name for the town.

34:00 When she and her husband began working in the underground, there was nowhere really to begin. The first thing she remembers was her husband's involvement in the war since 1938-the first mobilization to defend themselves against Germany.

35:00 Her husband had been drafted. It hurt him until he was dead that he had killed someone. Then he was a POW. He had no job, so therefore he couldn't get out of the army.

36:00 He organized sporting events during the mobilization. He stayed at first as a POW. It wasn't hard, he just wasn't allowed to go home.

37:00 Then her brother in law found her husband a job at the cinema.

38:00 He took the job so he could leave the army. After that he told he knew a Jewish musician who worked by the theater, and he needed some false papers. Her husband told her she had to go to get the papers. She thought it might be dangerous.

39:00 This was early in 1942. She had not seen deportations before this. Her husband did, but he didn't tell her everything even though he used her in his organization.

40:00 She doesn't know if she would have done all of this if her husband hadn't asked her. They didn't realize they were risking their lives. Her husband hated Germany.

41:00 He didn't know the background of what the Germans were doing.

42:00 She doesn't know when the Nuremberg Laws started in Holland, but it was a law in Germany.

43:00 When it began in Holland, then she realized something had to be done. In 1941 there was a strike. A communist came while she was working. He said they wouldn't let them take their Jews.

44:00 She and her husband went to the marketplace. There was a demonstration there.

45:00 There was a big building which was the heart of the strike. She lived across from this. She and her husband watched German soldiers drive around. There was a boy doing nothing peculiar except drive in the street.

46:00 The Germans shot him. she saw his brains splat. Now Semmy knew what hate was. This was the first time she really realized something should be done. This made her change. The Germans liked what they were doing.

47:00 Semmy says this lives in everyone. No one is better than the other. The strike to her made her realize her commitment to fight the Germans.

48:00 Now her husband involved her. They also had to fight Germany economically because they took their food.

49:00 They started arresting the Jewish people and kept them at a theater in Holland. They put the children across the street.

50:00 Not everyone knew about this. Her husband did. Many Jewish politicians were his clients.

51:00 He was involved earlier than she.

52:00 Her husband got into the underground for provisions for the Jews.

53:00 They would split pictures and put them together. Her husband was paid so he could pay for the pictures.

54:00 He often sent her to pay for the false papers and retrieve them. She thinks she was afraid at times. He once sent her to Utrecht at a cafe.

55:00 She thinks that she got about eleven papers here worth about 600-700 guilders per paper.

56:00 Later there was a non profit organization for making papers. There was a Jewish painter who worked on these papers when he hid in Semmy's house.

57: 00 Her mother knew what she was doing a little bit. Her step father worked ahead of her husband later on in the resistance. Her sister helped sometimes, but she didn't really know because no one told what they were doing.

58:00 Her husband used anyone he thought he could trust. Semmy did keep Jews in her house. In 1943 he brought her a baby. She had no children except her step daughter.

59:00 They were crazy about the baby. There was also another man who was 24 years old.

60:00 This man wanted to help the Jews too. They called him The Saint.

61:00 They talked to this man all night. They found addresses.

62:00 She told them they had to realize they were going beyond their own lives. They agreed. She also told her husband they had to get rid of the baby because of danger. This started an organization.

63:00 The baby lived

64:00 A boy gave her a book when her husband was arrested. He was killed in Bergen-Belsen. One of the young men kept track of everything they did for the children.

65:00 The names of all the children and where they were hidden were in this book.

66:00 She wants to have the book and gets it. She still has it today.

67:00 When Semmy dies, she wants the book to go to Jewish social workers.

68:00 There are 400 children in hiding in this book.

69:00 She tried many times to find more children. She explains how the book is organized. After the war some of the kids stayed in touch with her.

70:00 Her husband was arrested and eventually sent to Bergen-Belsen. She was never arrested. They had a house where the children were taken. They ate and slept with her.

71:00 The boys also found another center

72:00 There is a Jewish family that Semmy tells a story about.

73:00 There were some German Jews who were important business people. They were given cards so when they were arrested they got out of it. Many of these cards were false, and her husband provided them.

74:00 Her husband went into Jewish neighborhoods and would take the children.

75:00 Semmy lived near her mother in a neighborhood that had lots of Jewish people. The streets were all closed up; the Jews were shut out.

76:00 The bell rang at the house, and one of the boys cried, "I don't want to die." He had nothing.

77:00 The Germans started entering the house. They hid the boy in a large cupboard.

78:00 If you didn't open the door to your house, the Germans would rip it down.

79:00 Semmy was so afraid the Germans would see in the windows and see the mother.

80:00 After the Germans opened two of the three cupboards in the house, they were convinced Semmy and her mother would do nothing wrong.

81:00 The boy lived. Last April Semmy had a reunion with the boy.

82:00 At times she had to send away twenty or so children.

83:00 If a child wasn't on the list they would take him in. Her foster daughter was saved.

84:00 Her foster daughter was a Jewish girl. In 1943 she was thrown out by the Jewish people she was hiding with.

85:00 The foster daughter was 12 years old at the time.

86:00 Semmy's husband always wore a yellow raincoat and hat. A lady told the young girl that he would help her.

87:00 Her husband told her not to worry. He sent them to Lindbergh. Semmy took over the work after her husband was arrested.

88:00 In July 1944 her husband was arrested.

89:00 The girl came to live with Semmy because the others didn't want her since she ate their food.

90:00 Semmy thought she would tell everyone that the young girl was her maid. The step daughter was still with her too, even when her

father was taken.

91:00 Semmy wasn't at home when her husband was taken. He was searched under both of his names.

92:00 Semmy told her mother the address wasn't safe anymore. They went elsewhere. Her husband had a messenger girl who went to Semmy and told her he had been in jail for two days already.

93:00 The only thing Semmy could do was take over his work. She was able to write him letters.

94:00 Semmy can't remember how she remembers all that happened with her husband.

95:00 She sent him a note and told him he was getting out.

96:00 He wrote back and told her, " Why do you write and tell me I'm getting out Wednesday, when I was transported on Tuesday?" Semmy went to the jail and wanted to know where her husband was.

97:00 She had to go up to the head of the jail's office. He was a German and was very kind to Semmy.

98:00 The guard asked Semmy why her husband was in that house when he was arrested.

99:00 She starts to cry and says he was with a girl there who was already arrested.

100:00 The German man comforted her and told her not to cry. She didn't know what to feel. She had fought Germans, betrayed them, and now he was holding her in his arms.

101:00 He let her go, and didn't ask for anything. After she got sick with asthma and bronchitis. She never found her husband.

102:00 After a year she got a note from the Red Cross saying her husband died in Bergen-Belsen.

103:00 She doesn't know how he died. She asked for his body and they told her he was cremated. She wants to know why he was arrested, who arrested him, and how he died.

104:00 Maybe he tried to escape. This would be like him. Who betrayed him? She wonders if it was someone she trusted.

105:00 She continued his work. His messenger girl continued giving Semmy lists of addresses. Semmy had to provide people with money and cards.

106:00 Most of the children had no parents.

107:00 There was a house with Jews. Germans, and non Jewish Dutch.

She provided the money.

108:00 The banks were also asked to help provide money to the families who couldn't live on their money.

109:00 The people who lived above her mother were denounced.

110:00 There were others who did the same type of work.

111:00 There was a man who was in the Armed Resistance like her husband who helped the children.

112:00 Semmy, her step daughter, Foster daughter, the Jewish boy, and 10-12 other children lived the war. Her foster daughter was like a mother.

113:00 Semmy had to find food for all these kids. She had to make the contact with the outside world; she tried to find cheese.

114:00 No one had cheese. She drove all night on her bike. She was delighted when the war was over. They danced, and shouted. She was so happy.

115:00 They ran in every direction. Her foster daughter was still afraid.

116:00 She ran a different way back to the house. All the children went to bed. The foster daughter started to cry; she hadn't yet allowed herself to believe her parents were dead.

117:00 Semmy received money from the former resistance. She had hurt her back during hiding.

118:00 There were many medical bills because of this injury. The girls stayed on with her.

119:00 They went to school. They went to the beach for a vacation for a few weeks. They lived upstairs. The day they were supposed to leave the foster daughter got sick.

120:00 The last week the foster daughter came out of the hospital. There was a Jewish soldier at the beach too.

121:00 The first walk the foster daughter took, she met the soldier. He told Semmy "That is the girl I'm going to marry." She married him when she was 16. He was 8-9 years older.

122:00 Semmy gave permission for the marriage.

123:00 Semmy has been with her second husband for 34 years. He was never jealous of what she did or her first husband.

1:00 There were only a few people who did what Semmy did.



2:00 For Semmy, everyone is unique. Anyone can be a rescuer.

3:00 Only a few could do what her husband did. He used everyone for a good cause.

4:00 Semmy has no regrets. She knew what she was doing.

5:00 She could never go back on what she did. She never wanted to get out of it.

6:00 Her husband must have been an outstanding man. He knew the people he couldn't help were going to die. He even had to choose between children. Semmy couldn't have done this.

7:00 She thinks it is better that her husband died. He knew many people.

8:00 It was very hard. The circumstances brought his real personality out.

9:00 Semmy received a medal in 1982. Many people gave testimony.

10:00 There was a minister who wanted to find the people who helped him hide.

11:00 They didn't want to come out in the open.

12:00 Semmy thinks that the two oldest who found the group (her first husband) should have received the award medal. She wrote a letter and everyone agreed to this.

13:00 Not many people have been interested in her work. Everyone works only for money now.

14:00 She says the Armed Resistance was important, the human resistance wasn't. Taking lives was important, and if you saved lives, no medal.

15:00 A woman for the first time heard recently she was one Semmy's children.

16:00 Since the war, Semmy hasn't done anything like what she did then.

17:00 If someone were to cross her path, she would help. But she doesn't do it in any organized way anymore. Everyone can know about everything.

18:00 If she has money to spare, she would try to provide for others.

19:00 For many years she might have thought her husband was alive in Russia. When she remarried she thought about what she would do if this were true. As a husband the man she is married to now is

better, as a man of the world, the first was better.

20:00 If her first husband were listening now, he's understand what she meant. He'd say she was right. There were some good things during the war.

21:00 Nothing will be like the connection the people had during the war.

22:00 If you heard that someone was caught, it felt like your arm had been cut off. There are names and people she will never forget.

23:00 Semmy thinks that children shouldn't learn about the war, rather that they should realize that all that was bad in the war, what the Germans did, they could do to.

24:00 She has spoken in high schools about the war, apartheid, and anti-Semitism. She rescued Jews because of the way they were born. They couldn't help this.

25:00 If you persecute for something you can't change, there should be justice. She's not part of the army group anymore.

26:00 She is afraid people won't change. Everyone is egoistic.

27:00 She's responsible for herself first. But when she's responsible for others, she has to forget herself.

28:00 All of her morals she partly installed in her step daughter and her foster daughter. They are different than she, and she can't change their ways entirely. Her foster daughter lives in Israel now.

29:00 Her son has worked hard throughout his life.

30:00 Semmy hopes it's easier to work for others than for herself.

31:00 She hasn't seen her son too much. Her step daughter is in Holland and has one child. Her other daughter she's closer to.

32:00 All her grandchildren know about what she did. There is a Dutch children's book about what she did.

33:00 It is in Dutch. It's based on her memories and is several stories made into one. It's historical fiction.

34:00 The writer is the son of one of the men who worked for her in the group.

35:00 There is a lady who teaches children. She knows a lot about the book and could translate it.

36:00 Semmy thinks there is too much fuss about Anne Frank because there are so many Anne Franks. But if it makes people think then it

is okay.

37:00 It was harder in Poland because there was so much anti-Semitism.

38:00 There is no day that she doesn't think about the war.

39:00 No nation can get rid of this war. There has never been such a war.

40:00 When children ask her why was the war so important she replies, because of the fact that the Germans tried to wipe out a whole race.

41:00 Semmy says, You should never dislike the whole. You should never be jealous of the whole. This is the most of herself she has ever shown to a stranger.

42:00 She is a very open person, but there has always been something that she has held back. But this is the most she has ever opened up.  
.END.