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The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
Interview with Nienke Vienstran (Veenstra)
June 2, 1988

01:00 She was born in 1904 in Holland, in the northern town of Geikloostei.

02:00 The town was a small farming village. She had four brothers and five sisters. She was the tenth born and she is the only one left. Her father was a working man.

03:00 Her father did farming all kind of work. The family was not rich, but not poor either.

04:00 The mother took care of the children.

05:00 Her oldest brother was twenty years older than her. She was only seventeen when her father died. So her older siblings took care of her.

06:00 The family stressed the importance of religion. They were Dutch Reform Christians who went to church daily and were brought up by the Bible.

07:00 Her private school also influenced her. It was a private, Christian school.

08:00 There were no Jewish people in her village. Her only contact with Jews came with Jewish peddlers.

09:00 She knew about Jews from the Bible, though. She helped during the Holocaust because she knew man is not allowed to kill.

10:00 She knew what Hitler was doing, early.

11:00 She says that the Jewish people made money in Germany by working hard for it.

12:00 She says Jewish people have a better mind for numbers. That is why they make a lot of money.

13:00 She tells a story about a Jewish family. The father could

have supported the daughter, but he made her earn her own money.

14:00 Nienke grew up in a small village.

15:00 In 1931, she married and lived in another village.

16:00 She had heard of Hitler before he came to Poland. Her husband was in the army as a border protector. She knew of Hitler's threat because her husband had been called to the border. She also knew of Chamberlain's visit with Hitler in 1938.

18:00 In 1939, her husband was called to the border to protect the provinces of Holland.

19:00 She had four children (two boys and two girls) who were born before the war. In 1940, Hitler invaded Holland. She says everyone knew what kind of man he was.

20:00 She had no friends who supported Hitler.

21:00 When Holland was invaded, the army fortified the borders. The soldiers came home after.

22:00 Nienke tells of a Jewish girl who lived with the baker's family. She was dark and looked different.

24:00 One day her niece asked her if she would take care of a young Jewish boy.

25:00 She said yes. The Jewish boy's name was Fred. His parents had died. She changed his name to Jan.

26:00 He stayed with her until the end of the war. He had dark hair and long eyelashes. He walked like a Jewish person.

27:00 She would not let him walk on the road, so people would not be able to tell he was Jewish. Jan played with her children.

28:00 They did not know his roots or last name. A man from the underground would bring extra food coupons for the boy.

30:00 One time the boy invited a young man into the house. The boy

knew the man from the underground, but Nienke thought it was dangerous for the boy to be doing this.

31:00 She later found out Jan had lived with this man in the city.

32:00 She was afraid when Jan lived with her.

33:00 Nobody asked questions about the boy.

34:00 One day the Germans were going from house to house looking for Jews. She did not want to arouse suspicion so she unlocked her door and went out to get her paper. fortunately the Germans did not check her house.

35:00 When the Germans came the baker also had to hide the Jewish girl in his house (Krissna).

36:00 He put her in bed and put towels around her throat, making it look like she had Dypthera which the Germans were afraid of. This was successful.

37:00 She did the same with Jan. Putting him in bed with one of her daughters with towels wrapped around their necks. She believed Jesus protected them.

38:00 She was afraid. Jan came to her family from Amsterdam when he was five years old. She taught him how to speak Frise. He was intelligent.

39:00 She received a letter from Amsterdam from a Jewish home. They wanted the boy back by November, 1945, so he could receive a Jewish upbringing. Later an aunt found the boy and took care of him.

40:00 She was in the hospital when Jan left. She cried and so did the rest of her family.

41:00 She says that even though the people in the town knew the little boy was Jewish no one informed. They were decent people.

42:00 Her children did not find out he was Jewish until after he left.

43:00 Her children would have done the same thing. The boy had to be helped.

44:00 It was hard to have the boy there. There was little food and they had to be very silent.

45:00 After the war, she has seen Jan a few times. Four years ago she went to Holland (lives in Canada now) and he picked her up at the train.

47:00 He was a writer who was in a little trouble.

49:00 She named Jan after her real son. Because each person had an identity card with name and fingerprints on it.

50:00 Nienke wonders how the Holocaust could have happened. She says Hitler had help.

51:00 The ID cards' purpose was to designate the Aryans.

52:00 She has nightmares about the Holocaust. She cannot believe it happened. She heard of the Nazi brutalities.

53:00 The baker was the only other person in the village who helped the Jews.

54:00 She had heard that Jewish people never got divorced, now she knows that is not true.

57:00 In 1951, Nienke went to Canada. Her children like Canada.

1:00:00 She did not get a medal from Israel. She says she does not need one.

1:01 She would do it again, because it is her obligation.

1:02 She does not think the Jewish people are wonderful. They are normal people like any others. Her niece found homes for many people.

1:03 Her niece could not have Jewish people in her home because her husband was an English pilot.

1:04 Children should never forget the Holocaust. It is never right to take someone else's life.

1:05 Jewish people should never forget the Holocaust. She believes

a lot of people did not help because they were afraid.

1:06 She had to take the boy in. They were killing the Jews.

1:07 Her children got along with Jan. He knew he was Jewish and he was afraid.

1:08 The place he went after the war was a Jewish orphanage.

1:09 She knows God was there during the Holocaust.

1:10 She says these things happen because the sins of the people.

1:11 She is positive God exists.

1:12 She appreciates the Jewish penchant for sticking up for each other. She also cites that one Jewish lady called the people of her province childish.

1:16 She has many Dutch friends in Canada.