

ARI VERDULJN

01 June 1988 Burlington, Ontario

Note Taker: Erin McGann

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VCR Counter Used

*This tape offers a very unique perspective and is worth watching.

00:15- Ari speaks of a book that he has written. He parallels the camps of (01:05) World War II with Elijah in Samaria.

01:31 Interview begins.

Q: What year were you born and where?

A: 1911. I was born in Oudshoorn, Netherlands.

Q: In what part of Holland?

A: It was in the center of the big cities such as Amsterdam and Rotterdam. It wasn't even a town; it was a village.

Q: Brothers or sisters?

A: Yes. I was the third of 12. They're still alive except one who died in a car accident twenty years ago. Three of the eleven are still alive live in Canada; the rest live in Holland.

Q: What did your father do for a living?

0185

A: He had a feed and grain store that supplied farmers nearby in the cities and in.... In 1925, when I was 14 years old, we moved to Friesland at the top of the Kurthee(ph). He brought a milling business, which was quite different than the one in Oudshoorn.

Q: What type of a place was Friesland?

A: We lived in one of the eleven cities of Friesland, called Fneke.

Q: In Oudshoorn, were there any Jewish people?

0214

A: Yes there were. But it was unobserved; it was never talked about. I was very small, so I don't recall if there were Jews there or not. But if there were, they were just ordinary citizens.

Q: In Franeker?

A: The same thing. I only met Jews later on when I started working on my own. From 1930 to 1939, with a break in between, worked with Philips. There I had Jewish boys twice. Both times were not very nice. I wouldn't class them as the Jews. They were quite ruthless both of them. One escaped to the U.S. One belonged to the National Council of Jews in Amsterdam. He escaped the Holocaust and went to Israel. When the Jews had to wear the stars later on after they left Philips, I recognized one of them in...,but he pretended not to know me. I went up to him and said if he was in any trouble to come to my place. I gave him my address. But I never heard anything from him.

0268

Q: What type of business was it?

A: Philips was the big incandescent lamps radio plant. There was some sort of falling out between Ari and the department. He had to be reinstated in another department. My experience with the Jews at that time wasn't very good, but that didn't matter at all. Later we realized these people had to be helped; otherwise they'd be gone. My brother-in-law had been a black market dealer When the...came when the Jews were rounded up, my brother-in-law said that he was scared that the Jews he associated with would tell the police about his "dealership" when they started squeezing information out of the Jew. This was ridiculous because the Germans could care less Sol went there three times and convinced them they Jews should break up instead of staying there like sitting ducks.

0315

Q: This is confusing. We need you to be more chronological. Was your family religious?

A: Very much so.

Q: What religion?

A: Christian Reform.

Q: Is this Dutch Reform?

A: Yes.

Q: You went to Church every Sunday?

A: Yes. Twice.

Q: Did you read the Bible?

A: Yes. I know about 150 Psalms. I HAD to know them in Holland.

0363

Q: Which parent were you closest to?

A: My father. I was never close to my mother. As a matter of fact I didn't love her. She didn't love me for a very peculiar reason, I was named after my father's father, who was a bad guy in her opinion. Very poor businessman and short temper. So that meant that I was short tempered and a bad businessman. They had this crazy idea about all twelve kid. We were supposed to be like the people we were named after.

Q: Did you know your grandfather?

A: Yes and I admired him very much. He was a very good man. A poor businessman--so what?

Q: But your father was a good businessman?

0405

A: My father was a good businessman and a good man.

Q: Was it the religious things he especially taught you?

A: No. He taught not so much with words as by example. He made friends very easily, which is something I did not. My father was really my role model.

Q: He was loving and close to you?

A: As close as he could be with twelve kids. He worked hard so there.

Q: Was he generous and helpful towards other people?

A: He had to make ends meet, but he was very open.

Q: Was there anyone else while you were growing up that influenced you?

A: Yes. There was a teacher in Grade 3. He taught me self-esteem.

0499

Q: When were you finished with school?

A: I went through Grade 10. After that I went to a technical school practically at the level of college. I was 19 years old when I graduated from technical school. Then I started working at Philips.

Q: You had a trade?

A: Yes. I was an electrical engineer. I was a technologist at first because I didn't pass the exams necessary. Now I am equivalent to college-educated. One of the reasons I left Holland was that it was too much work to go back to take all the tests. In Canada I could study on my

own and pass the exam.

Q: When did you first become aware of the what Germans were doing?

A: In 1942. It was clear because they had the solution to solve the problem. The end was quite clear. My wife was a teacher at a school near the camp of Westerbork(ph). It was very close to the railroad. Then we saw that the people were loaded...standing room only. They threw cars out of the window in hopes that somebody would them and stick them in the mail. They didn't go there to work--you give them a crumb so they get there...But this was obvious that this was the end.

Q: When did you marry?

A: 1936. In 1968, my first wife died. I remarried in 1970. I have fourteen and sixteen year old daughters from the second marriage and six kids from the first marriage.

0635

Q: When did you begin to act?

A: I had gone from Philips to Helmond where I was working as an industrial engineer in Vlisco. There were no Jews there that I know of...just a couple. Most people did not expect the worst. My brother-in-law asked me to take some people so he wouldn't be blamed [for being involved in the black market]

Q: You saw what happened at Westerbork but essentially you didn't know what to do because you didn't know any Jews?

A: No.

Q: Your brother-in-law came to you. He had these people called the Winters. Now where did he get them?

0694

A: They had come from Germany. He was a merchant in Lotbach(ph). In 1935 they crossed over to Holland. He had a business...in Weindhoven (ph). They managed to survive, but then they had to wear stars and had to disappear. My brother-in-law asked if I could get rid of them. So I went down to Weindhoven to tell him to get lost because Winters didn't want to. He didn't expect to be picked up by the Germans, so he asked us to take his father with a few belongings in a cardboard box and his 14 year old daughter. She was with us on and off. Our solution was not to hide them. We just left the door open so they could come and go. It was safer to have the door open than to hide anything. We had young kids, too, so it wouldn't work otherwise.

Q: Winters stayed with you himself?

A: No. Winters and his wife never stayed with us permanently for any length of time. They had developed some contacts in Le Peel(ph), a marshy area east of Helmond. He had places to stay.

Q: When was your first child born?

A: 1937. Then 1938, 1940, and 1943.

Q: Your brother-in-law: how did he get involved?

A: He was in the black market.

Q: Was he in the underground?

A: No. Just the black market.

Q: How did the Winters get in touch with your brother-in-law ?

A: Winters was working in the black market, too.

Q: Did he ask your brother-in-law for help?

0831

A: No. My brother-in-law came to me and said get...of this guy. He was just sitting there to be picked up and my brother-in-law thought if the police squeezed him enough, they would get him too. But the Germans didn't even care.

Q: So you saved the Winters to help your brother-in-law?

A: No. I couldn't care less about my brother-in-law. I did it to save the Winters.

Q: Winters came to visit?

A: Yes. He came sometimes. When Le Peel was closed, he'd come for a few weeks. My wife was very strict with him. She wrote out his schedule: up at 8; eat then; 9 o'clock, you go to the library and you study there until, etc., etc.

Q: Did he or his daughter look Jewish? Were they Semitic looking?

A: Jews? You could smell them a mile away. Especially Ruth & her mother, too. A big surprise came just before Pentecost, 1943. My wife was late. There came three people walking in the middle of the road to our house. It was Mrs. Winters and two daughters of the N.S.B Nazi leaders. They lived a couple houses down. She [Mrs. Winters] had lost her way and had asked the girls where the...lived in German of course. So we asked what the Heck did you do? We told you never to ask anyone where we lived. If you get lost, you go into a Roman Catholic Church, and they will help you. So that night, I went to all of my friends before curfew, and none of them wanted to take the lady for the night. (Visitors had to be reported to the City Hall) The [Nazi] girls must have been struck with blandness because this lady was as Jewish as they come. If they only opened their eyes, they would have seen what was going on. So the next morning I tried to find somebody to take her. I wasn't going to take a chance. I found somebody who had done work for me before and told him I had an aunt in

Rotterdam who had been bombed out, and could she stay with you for a couple weeks? He took her in after the boarding costs were paid. Then the danger was over in Le Peel and she went back. I don't understand the conclusion of honor; this was something particular with me. The Lord promises His protection. If you read Psalm 34, it's a question of doing what He wants you to do, then you can trust the Lord to protect you.

Q: But there were very pious Jews, too. Why weren't they protected?

A: I can't answer that. I don't know. There are many mysteries.

1029

Q: The whole Holocaust is a mystery. I think a great deal of your strength came from what you believed.

A: Yes, but it wasn't a hard thing to do.

Q: But so few did it. Did the Germans ever come to your house?

A: No. Never.

Q: The Winters stayed with you from 1942 on?

A: On and off until the end of the war. We didn't...thing down. We have our memory.

Q: Were you under a lot of stress and tension at that time?

A: Yes. I was under a lot of stress. I had a lot of eczema at that time. It was a combination of harbouring Jews and the whole situation of the time. I had to scrounge to get food and work. The Dutch boys had to and work in Germany so they stayed at our place temporarily. I worked with the underground to get them cards.

1087

Q: So you also worked to get false papers?

A: Yes. I falsified the identification cards for the Winters, too. He became a cattle dealer, and his wife, I don't remember. If people died, we got their IDs. We did this through the underground.

Q: Did your minister know you were doing this?

A: Oh yes. He was in on the plot.

Q: How many others?

A: I only know of one. The father of one of the guys who didn't want to help me.

Q: Was your wife under a lot of stress/tension at this time?

A: Yes. It shortened her life. She died in 1968 of complications to rheumatism.

Q: What about your children who were born during this time?

A: They knew what was going on and didn't talk.

Q: Did they have normal childhoods?

A: Yes.

Q: And the Winters' daughter: did she fit in?

A: Yes. She wasn't a problem.

Q: You had many people in and out. How many would you say would you feed in any 2-day period?

A: At the most there were three or four extra.

Q: Did you know anyone else in the neighborhood harboring Jews?

A: No, but I'm sure people did it. You didn't talk though. The less you knew the better you were.

Q: Did any of your brothers and sisters help?

A: No. I wouldn't have helped had I not been asked. It was just the circumstances. It was our duty to say yes as a Christian.

1190

Q: Was this time good at 811?

A: I don't think there's any reason to say that.

Q: Some rescuers felt there was a real duty/purpose in their lives.

1228

Q: Did you feel any of this?

A: We realized we were doing the right thing. There was always that satisfaction regardless of what the outcome may be. But we were fully aware of the danger involved.

Q: You must have been relieved when the war was over.

A: You bet we were relieved.

Q: Is this something you and your wife agreed to do together?

A: Yes. We didn't have to discuss it. There was not a question whether we would take the girl.

Q: Did you stay in contact?

A: We received a card expressing heartfelt thanks. Ruth moved to Israel, and we lost track of her. In the early 1970s, I was writing my book, and got in contact with Ruth. She married a German, and they invited my wife and lawyer to see the new Israel for fourteen days.

Q: What happened to her parents?

A: The mother was living with her and the father had already died. The mother didn't live much longer.

1326

Q: When did you come to Canada and why?

A: 1952. The economical situation in Holland. There were three objections I had: I couldn't get a university degree. I wasn't allowed to teach on Saturday -there was nepotism. We started out in a horrible way here, but then I wrote my exams, and everything worked out.

Q: Do you tell new acquaintances about your role in the war?

A: Yes. It's part of my life story.

1414

Q: What would you want children to know about this time?

A: ...them make up their own mind. ...tell them the way it was--the good and the bad points.

Q: Are there any lessons to be learned from that time?

A: In Matthew 25, it says "Did you feed me when I was hungry? Did you clothe me when I was naked?" We teach our kids the Christian values. The way you love determines how you'll be judged later....

Q: What did you mean when you internalize something?

1546

A: I didn't need a trigger to act. I had internalized the need to help.

Q: You are interested in helping people, like your wife said you went to West Africa?

A: Yes. I'm still involved in organizations supporting third world nations.

Q: Would you say the war was more important or the same work you've done all your life?

1607

A: It's the same thing.

Q: I think that your work should be known to people because it's important to know there was some good done. Is there anything else you want to say?

A: Don't make such a big deal about everything.

Q: Do you think about the war much?

A: Yes.

Q: Is it on your mind then?

A: Yes.

Q: I guess part of the legacy of the war is that it never leaves you.

1702

A: But I don't think too much about it. I dream about it sometimes.

Q: How has this affected your children?

(Wife) A: I think he [Arson] has become a different type of Christian than we have. He's a political lobbying

Christian who is not for disarmament.

Q: Did the war affect him specifically in his politics?

1764

A: He's very rigid, conservative...has almost a fundamentalist attitude. It could be a result of his [Ari's] first wife's influence though.

Q: How would they have responded?

A: They probably wouldn't have helped. They play it safe and are not taking.

Q: Are they proud of you?

A: I don't know. They never talk about it.

1834

Q: How about when you received your award in Israel?

A: They said that's nice dad. It's a result of their upbringing.

1900

Q: Is there value in re-telling as a healing process?

A: Yes. It gets easier.