

# United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

## Interview with Amichai Heppner

**February 1, 1990**

**RG-50.030\*0094**

### PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a taped interview with Amichai Heppner, conducted on February 1, 1990 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

### AMICHAH HEPPNER

**February 1, 1990**

Question: Good morning. Would you please tell me your full name?

Answer: Well, that's a difficult thing from the start because you know my full name has changed but my given name at birth was Max \_\_\_\_\_ Heppner.

Question: And where were you born?

Answer: In Amsterdam in the Netherlands.

Question: And what is the date of your birth?

Answer: October 15th, 1933.

Question: Can you tell me your parents' names and their occupations?

Answer: Sure. My dad's name was Albert Heppner. He had no middle name. He was by profession an art historian principally, although he did some writing and some some dealing. A lot of art dealing. And uh my mother's name was Irene Marian Kramer (ph) and uh she had no profession as far as training is concerned but since my father was a freelancer she did a lot of work with him. In fact my mom and dad worked together during all the time that I can remember before things broke down to the extent nobody was working anymore.

Question: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

Answer: No. None.

Question: Uh, were your grandparents living?

Answer: Yes, my grandparents were living. That is to say uh I I got to know and meet one from each side of the family. Uh I knew my grandmother Dana (ph) who was my father's mother, and even better I knew my mother's father, whose name was Jacob Kramer and uh he lived with us.

Question: Could you tell me what your early childhood was like?

Answer: Well, my early childhood was not unusual for an immigrant family. Even though I was born in the Netherlands, I was barely born in the Netherlands. My parents escaped from Berlin earlier the same year that I was born which was 1933. And uh they settled in the Netherlands at at for them a very bad time. It was the midst of a de...depression and uh they could barely escape with what little possessions they had. They were relatively young married couple so they had a hard time economically and as I say they they worked together pretty well. And my father stitched together little bit of this and a little bit of that so that they could make a living. And so actually I was raised more by my grandfather in in that period of my life than by either parents and I liked my grandfather a whole lot better for that reason because since my father worked out of the home, why it was always shush here and shush there and don't touch and and make scarce. And grandfather, Opa (ph) I called him, Opa Kramer, uh he took time. He had the time. He was retired so uh he dragged him around with him and really had more of an influence probably on my early education, preschool, than my parents. I remember usually in the mornings, he would take me to the playground just to get away from being under foot at home and in the afternoon he'd take me to his pinochle game. So the mornings he made like a child and in the afternoon I made like a grandparent and sat very quietly on the chairs. I watched the old, old men, all refugees from Germany, play pinochle and drink tea and tell stories and that's how I grew up bilingual, at least bilingual. Uh my father was in a in a very international type of of occupation and there were always people from all over coming to our house because that's, as I said, where my dad conducted his business. Early in the morning already, my mother was an excellent hostess. She made, was well-known for her breakfasts so people who came in on the morning train from Paris would come in and sit down at our at our table and and uh talk, chit chat, and talk business. My

father was an excellent linguist. He was equally at home in German and in French and in Italian and in Dutch, and his English was quite good as well. He has a classical education. He spoke uh uh could could certainly read fluently Latin and Greek, so it it was a very actually lively I would say and international experience that I was exposed to. So even though my father had a very strict rule because he was really upset that uh the country that he loved so dearly, Germany, went for such for such crazy and criminal theories and activities as took place under Hitler. He had a very strict rule. No German. Absolutely not. They uh, my father went to to the trouble of translating German nursery rhymes and songs, children's songs he didn't know any Dutch ones and I don't why he didn't take the trouble to learn. Maybe that's hard for parents. At any rate uh the way out that he choose was he kept uh the German songs and nursery rhymes and just translated them. And uh made my mother uh sing or recite the translations. Which she did faithfully while he was around but it was much easier for her to do it in the original German, and so I learned them both ways, and of course my grandfather didn't pay any attention to what made my father said about that and uh as soon as we were out of ear shot, that was the language he talked to me. So as I say I was really raised bilingual and bicultural. But that had to be subrosa because we had to hide it from my dad because the the outside effect that we were to give is that we were a Dutch family and uh he wanted to forget about ever having been German.

Question: Can you describe the changes in your family life and in the daily routine after the Nazis invaded the Netherlands but efore you left Amsterdam?

Answer: Yeah. Well, of course, things went very much in stages. I think a lot of people who've who've lived through that have have explained it pretty much the same way. Uh the Germans, the Nazis, and it's hard to make that distinction, uh because the Nazis swept everyone along with them, uh the Germans when they invaded the Netherlands uh were an occupying power and in in the beginning made a real effort I think to kind of get the population on their side. So uh our first reaction when we saw that Holland was uh going to be lost from the standpoint of of the fortunes of war, uh my father tried to pack up the family and we went, we jumped in a taxicab that he managed to secure

somehow, and uh drove across the narrow neck of the northern part of the Netherlands to the harbor city of \_\_\_\_\_, where uh we heard that they were sending refugee boats to pick up people, but we came just an hour too late maybe. At that time they were already blowing up the harbor installations and one of my earliest recollections is just seeing the whole harbor area of \_\_\_\_\_ go up in flames. The reason that was so impressive is they had oil storage tanks there and uh of course that burned quite effectively lots of fire, lots of smoke. And uh a Dutch trooper at the edge of \_\_\_\_\_ turned us back and said it's too late and sent us back to Amsterdam. And then we were really scared because we saw Amsterdam burning too but they were blowing up the oil storage tanks there too in the harbor and so uh once we got back things got fairly well back to normal never completely because you know there was an occupying power in the street. And again some of my earliest recollection is walking to school. At the time we we Jewish kids were still going to the regular school. There was no thought of of segregating us. Uh but the Nazis one time just just for fun uh ran one of their uh uh personnel carriers up on the sidewalk just to watch the kids scurry. So they they were very much uh an occupying power and then gradually started tightening the screws, obviously first a little tighter on the Jews and and uh but right behind it on the rest of the population until at the very end no one, Jewish or non-Jewish, escaped extreme depravation. I mean the Jews were deported and gassed, but the rest of the people had a very hard time as well. And uh after the war, you know, I I went back to the Netherlands for about a half a year, and one of the interesting, for me, things that I did was I joined a therapy group because I'm having a hard time living all this stuff down. And I figured, in Dutch, on the scene, that might help me quite a bit. And there were some people in there my age and when raised that this was an issue for me, the subject completely switched from all the troubles they had at home and the troubles that they had at work, and they were completely there with me, talking about uh the experiences in the Netherlands, because no one came off free from it. But you know the early experiences that I had for example is that the Nazis, the Germans hard to hard to distinguish as I say built a wall down the center of my school. One side for the Jewish kids, one side for the non-Jewish kids. And uh that was unusual. Usually they picked one school for the Jews and another school for the non-Jews. That that's how how it was dramatized that things

were happening, things that were happening that segregated out the Jews and that I was one of them and that I was in trouble.

Question: Can you tell me a little bit about the events leading up to your departure from Amsterdam?

Answer: Yeah. Right. Well, uh as I say, tightening the screws was done on my family in a very dramatic way in that uh they first pulled my dad's work permit so that my dad, who was very much in the public eye uh giving lectures at public museums, going to auctions and so forth, couldn't openly do that anymore. So I uh I heard it's hard to know after all I was six, seven years old it's hard to know what I remember and what I'm reconstructing from what people tell me but I think I was very well aware that my father was uh having troubles with his business and where these troubles were coming from, that he had to do double bookkeeping and work out tricks with his friends so they could stay on in business and make it appear that he really was not. Uh they actually came to raid our place several times. First they came for silver and gold and the usual things that uh that they that they liked to steal, which was always done in very formal way, with receipts and stamps and all that sort of thing. Uh and uh later on they came by stages to steal my dad's art collection which was his stock for for his dealership in in art, and I remember the first time they came around they they sent the Amsterdam police. Those people must have really been in a very you know almost untenable position because they didn't want to do this. But they were made to do it and they had to work somehow and they were the police. They were taken over. So I remember when they came, my dad was out. He wasn't even supposed to be out of the city because he wasn't even allowed to ride public transportation anymore in those days. So uh mother made up a story as to where he was, and uh the police did everything they do to to calm her down they said don't worry about it uh, we don't even like to do this job but we have to do it, and they said if there is anything particular you'd like to do before we start our work, that's fine. Now this was a hint to her that if she wanted to make one of those paintings that they knew were were around disappear, they wouldn't mind. But you didn't know who you could trust, so here again I'm telling you part of what I remember, part of what I reconstruct but I still remember my mother taking one of those paintings, a little

one, and just letting her coat drop over it and see what would happen. And they pretended like it wasn't there. So gradually every time she'd pass through the house she she pushed that that painting further and further until she finally pushed it into a closet. Then they came and listed everything on official forms and sealed it in the closet. Put the seal of the city of Amsterdam on our on our hall closet, and that was the end of my dad's stock. Most of it they didn't get, but they got four or five good paintings which we've tried to in the interim to get back, unsuccessfully. The stuff that we got back was all saved for us by friends and neighbors. But uh the stuff that was confiscated, including my own bicycle, we never got back. And how people can sit with wellknown pieces of art, because my dad dealt in good stuff, that they know is stolen, this very day is hard to believe. So you know the Holocaust goes on because people did not make restitution, not in a general way. But the your question was what changed? Well, uh what what changed then uh is that the action against property changed to action against people. Now first they called up the the young folks and they told them, I remember I had a uh friend of the family that that played with me quite a bit. Uh he was he was called up and he was glad to go because in the beginning it was not at all clear what was happening to people that were being called up for uh work related uh for war related work in Germany. They told these folks uh, come work for us a half a year and we'll let you go to Palestine. And so the kids were were anxious to go. And they went willingly. Sent letters back, sent letters back on a regular basis. And when the letters stopped coming my parents knew. They knew even though nobody ever really said this out loud. So it was still a surprise the first day when they started picking up people in the street. And my father ran into one of those uh street raids but fortunately he had a lot of friends and uh one of the stores that he was dealing with, one of the neighborhood stores, the storekeeper pulled him off the street and says you don't want to go there. They're loading up Jews. So he had he hid him behind the counter and then after after curfew the Germans set an eight o'clock curfew on Jews in those days uh he slipped home and thought that that things were at least in the short run going to be better when they made a night raid on our block. And uh my dad was trapped, because uh it was very clear that they were coming at us from all sides, and uh that there was, that you couldn't just walk away from it. So my dad decided to go out over the roof and you know one of one of the real uh high grabbing experiences that that I have to

deal with is that I heard him discuss what some of the options were. His friends came over because they were worried. People took risks. They, Dutch people supported their Jewish friends, discussed what the options were, decided to go up over the roof. I had been told over and over again, don't go on the roof. And, but I knew just how to climb out the window and get on the roof and I knew he was going to do that and try to escape over the roof and I was really worried. Nobody said word one to me, except they suddenly noticed I was standing there. Somebody grabbed me, pushed me in bed, pulled the covers over me even though I was protesting that I didn't put on my pajamas yet, and said you be quiet and you act like you're asleep. And uh just about that time I heard the uh raiding parties stomp up the stairs. They, they the the real Nazis did everything they did loud, so you could always tell when they were Nazis and Nazi sympathizers. They would "Hail Hitler" real loud, and they had that opportunity cause we, unfortunately, had downstairs neighbors that were Nazi sympathizers. When they saw those raiders coming in, they opened the door and spent a lot of time hailing and shouting at each other in the hall, which was good cause it gave my dad extra time to get out. Finally they stomped up the stairs, stomped on the door. Finally one of my dad's friends let them in and quite innocently asked what they wanted, and although they screamed real loudly that they were looking for my dad and where was he and uh you know I heard my mother try to explain that she didn't know, maybe he had been picked up in the streets she didn't know where my dad was. And I heard them get madder and madder at my mom and finally tell her that they were taking her. And uh so they did. They barely gave her a chance to take her purse. And uh they dragged her off and put her in one of their paddy wagons and hauled her off. Well, you said how, how did it happen then that you left town. Well, uh things were formal and crazy at the same time. There were rules for everything which were frequently broken and were up to the whim of which ever commander was in charge. My mother was taken to a theater which was uh known as the Holland \_\_\_\_\_, uh which which later became known as the \_\_\_\_\_ because they they were no longer doing plays there. They were using this as a concentration point for for people that they picked up, for for you know, for the shipment. And uh while my mother was at this \_\_\_\_\_, at this theater, uh she spotted a friend from across the street uh whose daughter was quite friendly with uh his name was Fritz Salten (ph), and Fritz was uh working for the Jewish Council to try and and get some



comfort and and support for the people that had been arrested, detained or whatever word you want to use. And uh my mother called him over and said hey uh Fritz, is there any way we, I I can get out of there. And he said well, he says I know that your dad has done, well, she he would have said of course your husband, uh I know that your husband has done work for the Jewish Council. They're letting people off sometimes uh that whose relatives worked for the Jewish Council. Why don't you try that? And so, uh through Fritz we we got a letter in the right format saying that my dad had done work as a teacher for the for the Jewish Council, and uh \_\_\_\_\_ was the was the famous commander, infamous commander of of that uh particular operation, let my mother go. The only one he let go that day. So that's why I say things were very arbitrary. That day he decided to honor that particular rule. So I mean my parents couldn't have it dramatized very much more uh extremely that it was time to get out of there, but where to go. (Cough) My my parents had one real close uh couple who were their friends whom they had asked already prelude to that time to kind of scout around a little bit and just find anything that might work to get us out of there. And that was just in the beginning of some negotiation with with with them, very shadowy group uh who had had one front person by the name of \_\_\_\_\_ drink a moment whom Franz, that's the husband of that couple, had coincidentally just gone to see the very night that uh that they raided our place. They were unaware that we were being raided. So they hurried up these negotiations and uh even though they seemed very haphazard what apparently it would be is that uh they would, that this group then of adventurers would smuggle us south in a gasoline truck through Belgium, through France, up to a little enclave known as Free France uh which was kind of in between the uh occupied and nonoccupied areas of Europe, and which functioned as kind of a door, a lastminute door for people to escape. So in August of '42 when these events happened, uh we we left and went to the house of this Ari Hayward (ph), again to to see you know what what he could arrange to get us away further, so those were the circumstances that led to our leaving.

Question: Would you tell me now from there on, the actual leaving and and the events that followed after that?

Answer: Well, the hardest part I think for my parents in the leaving was that they had to leave my grandfather. He was uh getting senile and diabetic and there was no question of making the run with him, so they left him in an oldage home and it was very hard for us to leave him. Of course, they didn't tell me that we that we were going on the run. They told me that we were going on vacation, which was credible since it was August, the big vacation month in Europe, and they said well, we're just going to go on vacation to this new friend of ours, Mr. Hayward, and uh you can play with his kids and uh and we hope we'll have a pretty good time. Uh I didn't believe that but I also didn't have the nerve to ask what was really going on. And you know, later on I've I've given a lot of thought to this. Do you tell your kids what goes on if it's if it's tough news? And I've come to the conclusion that you do at least you tell a tenyear old. I was eight then. You tell an eight year old because eight year olds understand a whole lot. You don't need to tell them all the nitty gritty details, but you do need to tell them what's going on, because one of one of the most difficult things for me is the confusion. Hearing one thing and seeing another. Knowing that my parents were telling me stories. Don't want to say lies because they probably thought they were protecting me. Certainly thought that they were protecting me. But it was no protection. It was crazy making. It was crazy making. And we stayed uh with the the Haywards a couple of weeks until the Nazis raided the place, and they lost their nerve, and they didn't have any alternatives ready, so those were very difficult weeks from uh oh from mid-August to uh mid-September when uh we just wandered the countryside from one temporary shelter to another until we finally wound up in the bath house of a uh retreat center. It sounds too fancy it was just a little place out in the woods uh operated by a Catholic order and it uh was not being used for anything particular at the time some some \_\_\_\_\_ came their from time to time to go swimming. We ignored them. They ignored us and we each pretended the others weren't there, but of course they knew. And uh things were very unsettled. There was still frequently a question of is the truck going to come, is the truck not going to come and uh what's to happen next because incredible as it may seem, we were having our meals catered at this retreat center. It was very strange uh about meal time we you would suddenly see a little boy appear in that clearing in the woods with a with a package of food for all of us. And this boy that made the delivery was incredible because you know when you and I walk the woods you

hear the leaves crackle and twigs crack didn't hear anything. Suddenly the kid was there, and there was our food and then he would slink away and disappear. Well, this was obviously not anything that could go on. In fact one of the things that I remember is how extremely worried my dad was. We were having beautiful September weather, unusual for the Netherlands nice warm sunny afternoons where we could go swimming. I mean it was great, in the swimming pool right uh we had to go swimming actually cause we at that time had only uh the clothes that that uh that we carried with us on our back because we were on the move so much and uh while Dad and I went swimming uh my mother and the lady in the other couple that was hiding with us, uh did the laundry in the other end of the swimming pool. Uh but as I was starting to say, my dad was complaining about the good weather cause he says how long can this weather last. When the cold weather comes, we'll freeze here. There was of course no way to heat the bath house of a of a of a swimming pool and a remote camp. So you know, when fall weather comes, particularly sunny weather, I find myself getting very uncomfortable and I have to remind myself you know, that that harks back to these times and I'm only recently able to enjoy beautiful fall weather because I keep telling people the bad (ph) winter is going to come. Now the the that is un a very bad position we were in because I, it was quite clear that these adventurers we, we tend to want to see people in terms of good or bad but that doesn't always work. These uh these people that Ari Hayward put us in contact with were good/bad. They probably had some good motivations and uh from most of the stories that I hear about them repeated talk about how much money and when are you going to pay us and so on. They were in it principally for the money. And they were in a bad place because they couldn't deliver. They had gotten their deposit I am now reconstructing uh it's very clear that they had gotten their deposit but uh my father and and his friend uh Heinz Graumann who with also a wife and son was hiding along with us I didn't trust him at all. I didn't give him any more money than he could get away with. I remember those discussions. And uh it's amazing. There's a Dutch proverb that says little pictures have big ears. Uh this little picture had very big ears because I tried to find out as much as I could about what was going on because nobody was going to be telling me anything at all. Uh these people there, then these adventurers were in a bad way. What were they going to do with us? And as we know reconstructed, they decided to kill us. It had a number of advantages. First of all they knew

that if the Germans got a hold of us they would do more, they would do worse than kill us, and secondly since they had already figured out where Heinz and my dad were were keeping their money, they could get paid instantly and not have to take any more risks with us. So uh at the at that very time however the regular Dutch underground was starting to make some contact with that nebulous group of adventurers, and uh while they were exploring ways to get rid of us, they also explored a way of handing us over to the regular Dutch underground in that particular area of the Netherlands which was the southeastern corner, east of \_\_\_\_\_. And uh .....

END OF TAPE

...so the story that they told us was that they had some people that maybe could help them and uh one by one they would they would uh which would which would be safer than herding a whole group of six people through the woods one by one they would deliver us to these people, whereas at least a good portion of, at least two of these people were definitely decided on the murder route. They uh took Michael, the the other boy that was hiding with us uh he was considerably older than I, I was I was eight and he was probably around fifteen or sixteen at the time they took him first and they did in fact kill him. And uh later on uh I was told they found graves that, shallow graves, that they had pre-dug for all us. So they were really serious about doing us in. But uh killing is hard. People uh that talk about killing say uh your first killing really is the hardest. When you see a a vibrant young boy that had just been laughing and joking with you and you suddenly split open his skull and you see his blood that does something to people. And from the testimony that uh came out in the trial afterwards, the person that uh swung the shovel that kill...killed Michael, came to trial after liberation. It was clear that uh that the gruesomeness of of actually having done the act uh helped deter them from killing the rest of us, and then they tried the route of handing us over to the regular underground, which they did.

Question: Alright. After you were handed over to the underground, what happened then?

Answer: Well, at at first we were still split up and uh my parents and I were brought to the house of uh Harry Janssen, Janssen we would say in Dutch, uh a smallscale farmer and professional thrasher who lived in the outback behind uh the village of Durna (ph) which as I say is east of \_\_\_\_\_ and uh he was uh loosely connected with the underground. The underground has to be loosely connected or else it doesn't function in occupied territories. And uh that was an interim placement. They were going to decide what to do next. And uh to our surprise, after a while, the Graumanns showed up there too, because the people that were supposed to have taken them in didn't and the last time we saw the members of this nebulous group of adventurers that I talked about was when they delivered the Graumanns. Said they would come back for them and never did. And uh all the connections that were supposed to have worked for Harry to to get us away or out of the country or whatever, didn't work. So he inherited us. And although he never expected to be hiding five Jews for any length of time, he did. And I think the relationship immediately became quite close because of course in the beginning, no one knew what had become of Michael. And uh Harry could see Elli Graumann, Michael's mother, wilting more and more each day, not knowing what had happened to her son. So he he uh he started the underground into a manhunt. And they combed the place till they finally found one of the people of what I have been calling that nebulous group, and they nabbed him and interrogated him till they, till he told the truth, and showed where where Michael was buried. So that dramatized to Harry you know the the type of pickle that we were in, and I guess kind of gradually at first, week by week, he decided to to become the person to to shelter us, take charge of us. And he did that. He did this two years almost to the day till we were liberated, despite raids, despite searches specifically of his place, despite interrogation, this man was a master at dissimulation and withstanding uh interrogation. He could make up stories. He was a natural raconteur. We kids loved him because he could tell us kids stories too. A marvelous storyteller. That came in very handy for him, cause he'd make up some story and it always worked. Like one time I remember there was a search specifically of his place. They came to he he had his contacts and he had been warned uh that there would be a search of his place. And I I had the measles. I was really sick. And you know we had

various places that we would hide out when the word came that there'd be a search, but there was no question it would have been inhumane to stick me into one of these places so he stuck two of his kids uh about the same age in bed with me it was obvi...it was quite common in poor uh families for several kids to sleep together, but that was not the usual way that I slept. And the other two kids had the measles too I think, and so they they stuck them, he stuck them, all three of us, in in one of the bedrooms, and put a big sign on the door, "Quarantined", and so when the search party came through, he says feel free to look anyplace. I've got nothing to hide he says, but don't go in there. I've got some really sick kids in there, and the doctor put a sign on there "quarantined." I don't want you guys to get sick. So well after they made a perfunctory look inside and they say three real sick kids in there, threw the door closed, and uh you know, he got us through just by talk. And even though he had some very very good places that he tried at various place, at various times to hide us, the most interesting one was a double wall. In order to picture how the double wall functioned, you have to you have to picture a very primitive farmstead, and the farmsteads in in Holland uh from an earlier era like this one dated from, had the animals and the people under one roof. The people would live up front, and the animals would be in the back. Very convenient if you go milking cause you just open up a door and you're in the stable and you can milk the cows and bring the milk right into the kitchen. In fact that's what they did. Well, in this wall, they had they had two walls then one separating the house from the main part of the stable and then another separation between the cows and the horses. And that's where they built the double wall. And he had a friend, a uh a bricklayer come in, and duplicate the the wall that was already there exactly as it was uh oh about maybe uh a couple of feet away, and uh then to get to that place they would hoist us up to the rafters and let us down with a rope so that we'd be between the two walls and of course there was no door. Uh these raids always came at the worst times. I remember one time my mother, my mother had a severe case of diarrhea when the alarms came and they hoisted her in there with uh with uh a potty and uh can you imagine those poor people that had to sit there for I think twenty-four hours with someone who had an over-flowing potty of diarrhea. Ugh. Fortunately they hid me someplace else that time. They hid me in a haystack.

Question: Tell me a little bit about your daily routine when you were living with the farm family.

Answer: Well, I think I think everybody was quite aware that in order to go, to keep from going stir crazy, you have to keep people busy. And uh the Janssens increasingly gave us work to do. We peeled all their potatoes, and when I say all, potatoes was a staple and uh the Janssens were sheltering not only Jews but at various times various members of their rather extensive family that had moved to the city and were running out of food. So there was uh one other chicken house full of people. Uh Harry used to say how fortunate that the Nazis stole all our chickens. This way we can house the people. We can house the refugees. There's another chicken house full and sometimes some of the other buildings. I had relatives in them too. So we strung the beans and peeled the potatoes. Something that uh people find hard to believe we strung tobacco and Holland is not known as a tobacco raising country, but uh you know, we were talking a little earlier how starved people were for for these cigarettes or anything resembling cigarettes, so they found some variety that would grow there and people took tremendous risks smuggling uh seeds for tobacco which we then grew secretly and strung secretly. There was a lot of secret stuff. I still remember Harry did another thing which was strictly illegal. He butchered. Uh he butchered hogs. And we, and people who farmed were supposed to deliver all uh animals that were ready for market, all produce to the Germans, which they then shipped east. They didn't give hardly anything to the people in the Netherlands, which is why there was such a famine there. But uh Harry in contravention of all the rules, slaughtered, and we did that right on the kitchen floor. Uh can imagine a little Jewish boy...(laughter)...a scene like that. I had no real sense of where meat was coming from and to see then slit the throat of a hog and string it up from the ceiling and cut it up into pieces and make sausage out of the guts that was some experience. But uh it was something that the kids all watched with glee and uh I made a real effort to to fit in. It was hard because you know I was uh a city slicker from the north and they were country bumpkins from the south and they, they not only had a completely different culture, they had a different language. They spoke Dutch but it was such a different dialect that uh if they talked among themselves I couldn't understand a word they were saying. And I knew I was I was a native Dutchman. However fortunately

they learned standard Dutch in school so if they wanted to they could include me. And of course in short order I learned the dialect and learned to watch such things as hog slaughter. And it was uh kind of a fun thing in a way because the one thing that uh we kids would get out of it immediately was the bladder. And you will say, what do you do with a hog bladder. Well, what you do is you try to scrape and wash it clean the best you can, and then you take an old tin can and you tie the top of the bladder to the tin can much as you would make a drum, with one difference. You'd also take a stick and you would tie that to the center of the bladder, centered over the drum, centered over the over the tin can, and then you would tie it taught. Then you would spit into your hands, \_\_\_\_\_, and then you would slide it up and down the stick and that was an instrument, an instrument which everybody learned to hate. But uh for uh for uh, what what is this holiday called in English sometimes it's it's hard to translate on the spot uh it's it's a spring holiday just befo...just before the frost (ph) uh, help me, it's fat fat Monday in French. Mardi Gras. OK. Uh on Mardi Gras we would go out and uh and serenade the neighbors which with what we called the \_\_\_\_\_, and uh as much to get rid the awful noise as anything else, they would they would give little handouts and then the kids would troop other places. Well, of course I couldn't do this during the occupation but I was there a good while after and uh I remember doing that with the kids and of course I had the fun of of making my own \_\_\_\_\_. Well, what else did we do? Well the interesting part is that unschooled and unlettered as the Janssen's were, uh especially the older girls got quite interested in all the literary activity of the Ph.D.'s that uh were in hiding with them. Now these Ph.D. uh parental generation of mine was was odd from from my retrospective point of view. They were dressed like you and I are today, in three-piece suits and tie, on a farm in the outback where there was no pavement within miles. Where there was mud all around, where they had to make fire in stoves with wet peat that filled the place with acrid smoke in every morning. That was my dad's job and uh he was he was extremely allergic. He had uh he had a mild case of asthma and and lots of associated allergies and was the worst possible job but Heinz never could learn how to light a fire, so that was my dad's job which he did in his three-piece suit and tie, every morning. That went on first. Uh so that showed the kind of activity you asked activity uh it is amazing the p...these two Ph.D.'s had their literary material shipped in on on the underground. Uh my



father had a connection in Amsterdam. One of his students, a very advanced student of art history, uh collaborated with him in the writing. He did uh the research work in the libraries uh which he which he would either copy or summarize and send send down, and my dad would would write in his field. And uh he had a portable typewriter, so big we still have it today a little Hermes (ph), a baby Hermes that uh he picked up in Switzerland and it still works today. My mother uses it today and has used it all this time. Tremendous advertising I would think for that firm. Well, in that outback place they had a typewriter. Uh Heinz who had different interests uh decided to do a history on the life of Millieure (ph), the playwright because to the underground he he got uh in contact with a group of monks across the border in Belgium, in the southeast corner of the Netherlands, very close to Belgium uh who unbeknownst I guess to the uh uh regular scholars had hoarded away the personal papers of Millieure which they smuggled to Heinz and which he made a treatise out of. He finally wrote a play on the life of Millieure so that's what went on in that chicken house, as hard as it is to believe. Well, with all this literary activities the kids came by to see and my father started uh teaching them uh how to do poetry and how to make drawings and we made skits. I remember one of the neighbors who knew most neighbors knew uh that Harry was hiding refugees was having a fiftieth wedding anniversary and we made the most elaborate uh skit for them, uh a whole production uh uh weaving together stories from from the families that were going to be at this uh at this at the ceremony, at the celebration. And I still have those today. Very good stuff. And uh so it it made a very nice uh contact between uh people who otherwise would have been semiliterate. Uh there are members of the family who who didn't join in this. \_\_\_\_ is you know barely literate even today. Uh their their letters take a genius like myself to decipher but uh we became very good friends which is from what I hear a rather unusual story because relations between people who were hiding and people who were hiding them were not always the best. You can imagine what tremendous pressure that put on people and uh the Janssens did extremely well not only in successfully hiding the five people in their charge for for uh two years and then taking care of them afterwards, because afterwards we had no place to go. We were in the part of the Netherlands that was liberated half a year befo...before the rest. We were fortunate in that respect. So even while we lived in the war zone for a half a year they continued to take care of us. In the beginning we had

money to pay them, but I I find in going through the uh uh documents we have from this time that uh shortly after liberation we ran out of money, and food was even scarcer then if possible than before. Harry continued to feed us and uh Dad wrote him an I.O.U. and I have the I.O.U. that he crossed out uh because he decided to forgive the debt. So that was uh the kind of relationship we had with the people.

Question: Did your, did you get into a routine for for studies?

Answer: Yeah. I personally had such a routine where there were at least two or three hours every morning that uh we had subjects that I didn't particularly like and that I don't think my dad was all that interested in either. He was a very literary person. Math and and sciences were not his strong points, so that's what we saved for the morning. But the fun part, the composition, the drawings, the language studies and don't forget geography geography was the overriding interest because you know that's where our salvation was to come from in a literary in the literal sense, so we we traced the Allied troop movement over every inch of North Africa and through Italy and through France until they finally came through Belgium to liberate us, so I I you probably remember when uh the Allied troops first landed in in uh western France they they came to Normandy and were stuck there, and I still know all the little hick town villages like \_\_\_\_\_ in Normandy where these battles were fought because uh they were all recreated in my atlas that I still have today.

Question: What were some of the hiding places that were used for you and your family and the other refugees when for example there was a raid?

Answer: Well, I've mentioned the principle one. Uh we we uh, the first one where we were the least prepared, Harry took us way back into the peat bog where he knew of an abandoned barn where we hid in hid in the attic. Uh after that as I told you he constructed or had constructed this double wall. For a time they they toyed with the idea of building an air raid shelter with uh with a secret room in this, but even though the air raid

shelter got partly built that that never came up. One time they tried digging a tunnel under a haystack for me. That was special for me because it couldn't be uh so big that other that other people bigger than a nineyear old that I was at the time would fit in. You couldn't hide in the haystack because it became known pretty quick that when they did a raid they always ran uh sabers and bayonets through haystacks. If they came up with blood they knew they caught somebody. So, but under the haystack was the variation that was the worst night I think I ever spent in hiding. That was awful, in the cold clammy dark place under that haystack. Uh I complained very little, but they never did that again because I I did complain and that was really awful. Uh other times when there was little advanced notice we would just hide in the ditches and plenty of ditches to hide in in the Netherlands and uh in a dry, in the drier season that gives you quite a bit of cover and mobility cause if you can get some sense of which way the raid is going you can constantly keep cover and and keep on the move.

Question: Were the raids frequent?

Answer: Well, uh I am reconstructing that there must have been four that actually reached the place and maybe three or four others in the neighborhood which were just as bad from the standpoint of getting everybody all excited because you never knew are they going to come to your farm or not, but uh there was a Nazi sympathizer unfortunately that uh lived across the street. Again it's hard to say. You know, as I told you before, it's hard to tell the good guys from the bad guys. Uh my hunch is uh that this fellow like like many people who who played with the Nazis was more interested in being important than being disloyal and uh you know, an occupying force, especially a loud and oppressive one, has a certain amount of attraction to it, and uh there was an element, there's a type of of a personality I think that gets attracted to this and wants to go over to them and and tell them something that they don't already know, and get pat on the back and be told you're a great citizen and great supporter of the new order. Uh and uh it is pretty clear that uh that the that the neighbor across the street told on us which is breaking ranks with with all the rest of the people around who who did know. And uh after liberation Harry really confronted this guy according to what uh his wife

Nina (ph) told me later, until he had this guy on his knees in the middle of the street begging for mercy. I mean there were that kind of strong feelings about but uh that is how come there were specific raids on our place. I mean there were there were really actual fingers pointed at Harry and that he was able to keep cool under those circumstances. One day he payed played cards to, in the first raid as a matter of fact, he carried off by playing cards. He and his friend Marinus (ph) who were who was his closest friend and who was in the underground with him, uh had gotten notice that uh that we were going to be raided with very little advanced notice. Took us out to this barn in the outback like I told you, and then he and Marinus uh uh got together some drinks and uh spread the card, cards out you know moments before the raiding party came. They they acted like they had been playing and drinking all night, acting completely surprised. What you guys looking here on a on a strange night like this? Well, we were told to make a search. Search for what? Well, you know, that conversation went on like that till they got them into the game where where these two excellent card players first took all their money. To keep interest in it, they let them win some of it back, which you know ate up a whole lot of time, all the time saying oh there's always time to go looking around the place, till they were so drunk and so tired that uh they hardly did any looking around at all. And Harry kept the best uh the best drinks for occasions like this. So he he played his way through a search which is probably also weird in the annals of uh secret operations.

Question: We'll pause here for a moment to change the tape.

END OF TAPE

Question: Mr. Heppner, can you tell me whether there are any stories about Mr. Janssen that particularly stick out in your mind?

Answer: Yeah, well he he did some really nice and and supportive things. Probably the most supportive thing that he did to help us live through which which was a very difficult situation I mean here we were in this chicken house, right, uh

with for for the most part uh no opportunity to go elsewhere. One thing he did is he built a uh site barricade next to the chicken house out of out of some of sheaves of grain, kind of a palisade and uh so we could walk you know short distance like maybe ten feet back and forth outside or sit in the sun and be shielded from the road by that. But one thing that he did that I I think was particularly thoughtful and dangerous was to bring in a radio, a receiver. Now you must understand that nobody in the Netherlands was allowed to have a radio. There were certain people who with uh certain people that were deemed trustworthy by the Nazis who could get a permit for a special radio which was constructed so that it could only get two stations, which were the two approved stations that they felt people should listen to. So to get a a regular radio that could listen to anything, shortwave radio, was impossible. But he got one anyway. And dangerous because one can trace radios without making house searches. You can trace apparently whether someone is receiving air waves uh electronically. So it was uh a very risky thing to do and uh when my father got over the shock of this very special gift that Harry brought him, he he mentioned that and he says well, how many times can they kill us already. So this was the attitude that that he took and uh so my father really made a business of of listening to the news of of the war and for a while we, he even put together a little underground newspaper. His best source of information was in English but his English wasn't really good enough to to follow uh news broadcasts too well, so he found uh a German station that was giving the uh the party line, the German version of how things were going in the war, at dictation speed in English, because apparently this was done as as as kind of a propaganda tool to Englishspeaking peoples, to show them how the Nazis were really winning the war, and so my father could listen to the English broadcasts at dictation speed which was done so that people could copy it down and and you know make little newspapers out of it and uh then would listen to the same broadcast at regular speed, and then he would train his ear so that he could understand the terms that would be used in any kind of a of a broadcast. Then he would listen to the news a third time from the Allied side, get the true story and understand it. There was no paper and my dad scribbled on on the back of old envelopes, in the margins of of diaries, of of tear<sup>a</sup>off uh uh calendars and everything. I still have some of these pieces of paper very very small, hurried writing, where you could see how he was following the news. But for a time they did manage to uh

to put out a little newspaper till word got back to Harry that uh this was being noticed by the wrong people and we quit. But uh Dad still would uh feed information into to the underground on the progress of the war and of course we all followed with with great interest ourselves. And that radio stayed with us throughout. I remember I I did I did some drawing as I told you, that was one of the special subjects that my dad taught me. He he was a pretty good cartoonist and uh one time he said what are you drawing, and he said, and I said well I'm just drawing this wall of of things in the chicken house. He says but you're not going to put in the radio. I said well yeah I guess not. So here I have this drawing where you can see the ground wire of the radio which I had already drawn, and instead see see a clock on the shelf where the radio was. It was kind of funny. A censored drawing.

Question: Were there uh any other refugees on the Janssen farm?

Answer: Not on their farm. First I told you we were two refugee families there. That was enough. If you're talking about Jewish refugees, we were aware of one other Jewish refugee in the neighborhood although after liberation we heard of of more. This was was an interesting thing because we were, we heard that uh this man was a rabbi, and uh there was a short message passed back and forth where he found out that there was a a nine year old kid there. And so he passed back a message saying no, that he was not a rabbi. He was a rabbinical student and uh that he was quite interested in Jewish education and he wanted to now already be working on a text that could be used in the postwar period for uh teaching Jewish kids and could he try his manuscript out on a real live student. So my father was delighted. His his background in Jewish history particularly in Hebrew was not very strong, so we used uh these letters which were addressed as letter to a young friend, \_\_\_\_\_, which was really the manuscript of uh that rabbi \_\_\_\_\_ was uh was sending us and I still have some of those uh letters where he was teaching me Hebrew and Jewish history and and uh and uh culture and customs long distance. So that was incorporated into my regular lessons and uh Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ survived the war and became I think a very leading post uh Holocaust uh rabbi of the Netherlands. Uh the liberal Jewish community really grew after the war because uh most of the survivors had that kind of

a tendency and he led the liberal movement and actually the uh liberal Jewish synagogue in in uh in Amsterdam is built with the whole Holocaust theme of, the theme of rising from the ashes, and uh that movement is the one that uh \_\_\_\_\_ led after he finished his rabbinical studies. So when I visited the Netherlands in the '60's I I got an appointment with the who had then become great man, and he could give me exactly twelve minutes. He felt terrible, but but you know, I was on one of those American tours where you did I exaggerate ten countries in six days, so it had to be that afternoon and he was just completely scheduled up. But I got to see him that one time. The next time I went to the Netherlands, unfortunately he died rather young, but his son took over his his pulpit and they still have Rabbi \_\_\_\_\_ in Amsterdam.

Question: Were there any uh Allied soldiers that were refugees in the Janssen farm for any brief period of time, or in the area?

Answer: Well, I think that the underground movement in the area where we where we were at was the most enthusiastic about rescuing pilots. Uh pilots were regularly being shot out of the air because a good part of the war was was carried out on in the air. Uh the decisive battles really were in the air, not on the ground and uh so one time generally these two various underground operations were kept separate for obvious reasons one time a pilot stayed with us overnight. And this was very exciting and of course the pilot was very pleased because he hadn't really been able to talk to anybody because all he knew was English. And to find someone in the outback that spoke English was to him a real find and you know, my father and he, they talked all night about you know about his background and his fears and he finally could get clued in as to what was happening to him, cause he really didn't know who had taken possession of him and what they could do for him, so I remember my father and and this man, an Englishman, talking all night till the next morning when they came to get him, and they got him out successfully. They, that was a pretty successful operation they smuggled them south into France and then into Spain and Portugal and it was a regular route for to ship downed pilots back that way. And never or they did use if for Jews but not with equal enthusiasm.

Question: Did you have any personal uh contact with resistance fighters and and develop an understanding of the depth of their operations or see any of these people at the farm?

Answer: No. Uh this this this was nothing that that a kid could understand and I I know that Harry told us as little as possible of his operations because you know that that was survival. Even his wife who's still alive and whom I questioned about this recently said that she didn't know and didn't want to know all that he was in to.

Question: Before I ask you about the liberation, is there anything else, any particular story that you remember about the time that you lived with the Janssens that you'd like to to tell now?

Answer: Well, I can tell you something that ties right in to the day of liberation. One of the side elements of the air war was an effort by the Allies to disturb the German communications, and for a time they would drop lots of uh little strips of black paper with aluminum foil attached to them, which I guess uh disrupts radar and what happened I guess uh fly through a radar net that otherwise might detect planes that were coming through, so we kids made a game of this. And we would go out in the fields and hunt all those strips of paper and use them for art projects. I still have a calendar for example that that where I made the backing out of out of those little bits of paper which we called silver paper. And the area in which we were, atypical for the Netherlands, was solidly Catholic. In fact that's probably why the people were successful in in hiding Jews because of the solidarity among Catho...in a Catholic enclave in the midst of of a protestant country. And uh so we would go through the fields and meadows singing "Holy St. Anthony, dear friend, I hope that you will help me find a little slip of paper," in Dutch it rhymes. [Speaks in Dutch] And we were hunting uh \_\_\_\_\_ when the call came that uh that the liberators were finally there. You must picture a country which, countryside which had no paved roads whatsoever, didn't need paved roads because nobody had a car. Only the doctor had



a motorcycle. And uh so all you had was these ruts through the through the sand and through the clay, and we had the worst weather in the fall of '44 that most people can remember. It rained and it rained in a country where it's already quite wet, so the the troops that were coming through there at the time, we later heard that this was part of the operation Market Garden, where they were trying to make a quick dash up to the northern part of the Netherlands only it never worked uh only had one so-called hard road. We called it the hard road because it was paved through the whole neighborhood, and it was the only way in which armies could operate. And so uh I remember and the call came up the uh the English they called everybody that spoke English, English it didn't matter whether they were Americans or Scots or Canadians or Australians they were all English the English are coming. So uh the cry went out for the kids to come back from the field so we all ran back to to hear what was happening, so my father says uh the English are coming and uh they are at the hard road. And uh I want to go and have a look at them. Do you want to come along? And I said to him, isn't that dangerous. And he said yeah. Yeah, I guess it's dangerous. You don't have to go if you don't want to. So, while we know who who would pass up a challenge like this so we trudged through the mud, and they had put tree trunks on the paths to so that people could uh at least not sink into the to the deepest mud puddles. It was incredible how wet the countryside was. I still remember balancing on falled tree trunks to get to the hard road, and there they were a long column of tanks, one right after the other. I think they were Canadians, the first ones that came through there. And uh so we jumped up on the tracks of of of the tanks and looked in to the turrets to to see who was inside and started conversation with these people, but between fire fights. Uh the radio would crackle and they'd say another barrage is coming in. Everybody down. Said lower the turrets. We would jump into fox holes which which the Nazis had considerably considerably dug beside the road which were of course full of water. So we'd duck, duck into the water till the next volley of shots went by, jump back out and talk talk to the soldiers some more till I still remember a large haystack just across that narrow little road where where I was sitting in the foxhole, uh burst into flames. Then I'd enough. I mean that burst into flames like you couldn't believe it just "poof", just like that and uh so I I said to Dad right then and there, I've I've had enough and I

made my way back to the farm. I I don't know how long they stayed. But that was a very exciting time.

Question: Do you remember the date of liberation?

Answer: Oh yes. I remember it very clearly. It was the 24th of September 1944. The reason I remember it so clearly is that when we started hearing over the radio that the uh uh liberation forces were coming closer and we were seeing more and more planes coming over and so forth, Harry and my dad made a bet that we would be liberated before my dad's birthday which was the 28th of September. My father said I think they'll make it, and Harry says no way. He says they they can't get here that fast. And uh so my father won the bet by four days and I still have the \_\_\_\_\_ bill that Harry initialed to show that uh Dad won the bet. And that has the date right on it.

Question: What was your initial contact, I mean your real, other than that that one visit with your dad to watch the soldiers go by, what was your real involvement with the uh liberation?

Answer: Well, the the German forces counterattacked as as you know from having read the story of Market Garden, and pinned the liberation forces down, I would say exactly at our farm. I still remember hearing that that one night the Germans had had retaken and occupied the farm right next to ours. So it was that close. So we were literally in the front line and the company of soldiers that was the nearest to us physically were Scotch, Scottish soldiers and uh they didn't like you to call them Scotch. They wanted to be called Scots. Uh and uh they made kind of a mascot out of me. They had very little contact with the rest of the population because no one spoke English but to find a little urchin that's that's uh spoke English and wanted contact with them was a real turnon to these soldiers. And they really spoiled me. I mean they they fed me their candies and they gave me their tea. They brewed tea in uh fireplaces made out of barrels. They would set up a barrel, fill it full of sand, pour gasoline into this end, and then get a big other kind of a barrel or kettle and put it on top of top there and cook tea in huge quantities and right in the middle of

battle they would always have their tea. The Scotch just the same, the Scottish just like the English. And uh they burned down many a farmstead with their bonfires, which were all done in the name of tea. That's what we had the most of tea and apples. And and that fall the apple trees which were which were all around had a had a fantastic year and the, you know Dutchmen are are kind of taciturn you have a hard time expressing their emotions so what everybody did was whenever you saw a uh soldier you gave him an apple. And that's what people did. And I still can hear today my mother and father kind of shaking their heads and muttering when they saw apples with one bite taken out of them along side the road when everybody was starving. Uh but uh they fed me their their candy and their tea and and their fresh baked bread which they had shipped in from Paris. Strange things armies do. And uh uh it got to the point uh where I was firing their cannon and when my dad heard that uh I had been detonating cannon he put put a stop to my hanging around with these troops day and night. But I had made one, friends with one man in particular. His name was Charlie Frazier (ph) from Aberdeen and uh Charlie followed me home and made friends with my parents and uh just loved to be with a with a family. I mean he was he was one of the few soldiers that was a family man. He had two kids of his own, and uh he just couldn't get away from his camp often enough to be with us, so he he spent long periods of time with us, Charlie did, and tell us stories about his family back home to help him feel better. Anything we wanted he'd give. Well I remember one time I asked him for an ammunition box. Now remember our communications weren't that perfect. When I said I spoke English you might as well say I spoke pigeon, so uh I asked him for an ammunition box which I wanted for a lunch box. So uh he said fine, he would he would get me one of those. One evening we could uh, he he trudged in it was raining as it usually was he he tracked in through the mud, the mile or so from his little encampment, and uh he said to us, I've I've got your box. And you know, they don't speak normal English in Scotland either he had a very strong Scotch accent finally we understood what he was saying, but we said to him, what do you mean you've got our box. Where it is? Well he said I left it outside. And why'd you leave it outside? Well he says it's heavy, it's big. The poor man had brought in one of those great big boxes that you put shells in not where you put those not where you put little bullets in. He thought that's what we wanted. Well we we still have that box that he brought us at at such great cost. It it sealed pretty

good against uh against the damp and my mother kept clothes in it for many years. In fact she just moved a couple of years ago and she finally took her winter clothes out of that uh out of the box and said to me, you uh you uh do something with it. And I said fine. Well we'll give it to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, and that's probably where it will be.

Question: What uh, what was the physical condition of your family and the Graumanns and the Janssens, at the time of liberation?

Answer: Bad and and getting worse. Because the food situation really was bad and the strain and stress was really telling on the people. I mean I'm reconstructing this afterwards. Uh in the spring of '45 I was really sick and uh that was the time that the northern part of the Netherlands was just starting to be liberated. It wasn't near as dramatic as our liberation because uh the Nazis just faded away at a certain point because their supply lines to the east uh had been broken and militarily the northern part of the Netherlands was never forcefully taken. But the famine there was worse than it was in the south. It was bad enough with us but at least we had we had scraps of food. Uh in the north they had nothing. So my father got together as big a package of food as he thought he could manage and uh started to make his way north because he knew his friends in in Amsterdam were starving. And uh the time that he said goodbye and going back to Amsterdam was the last time I saw him, cause he took sick on on the road and died. I never saw him again. Well I got sick at the same time and uh I was put in the hospital and uh never heard that my dad had died. They didn't tell me. They were still shielding me. For months they didn't tell me that he had died and they kept making up stories as to where he might be and I guess that's why I have a tough time believing people even today because people just weren't straight with me. Well, they figured he's a poor sick kid why bother him with the story that his father died and then finally they were caught in their own stories, so you know then no one made up makeup stories and I just had to find out on my own that my dad was dead, which was a very hard thing for me to live down and of course it was hard on my mother. No need to compare who it was harder for, but she depended a lot on him. She, he was her whole life, our lifeline to the world. She remained a real

German house \_\_\_\_\_ and whatever my dad said, went. So she made very few decisions and was very dependent on my dad. So to have him die at a at a critical time like this when everything was in the shambles was very hard on my mother. Uh the Graumanns uh tried to go back to Amsterdam. When uh Mrs. Graumann, Elli, came back to her old surroundings, it hit her even harder what had happened to her son, and couldn't deal with the grief, so she committed suicide. I didn't know about it that at the time either. I I heard that afterwards too. So really out of the six people that that started out on the run together in August of '42, uh out of the six people only three survived. And none of the losses was due to Harry. My dad died after liberation. Mrs. Graumann of course a few months later, and Michael before we got to Harry. So Harry has a perfect record. But uh the survivors, there's there's only half of us. Dr. Graumann uh remarried and settled in uh Topeka, Kansas, where he still lives. He is in his 90's so he's a real survivor. My mother still lives. She is uh 85 years old and still goes to work every day here in uh the Washington area. Uh the survivors are are tough people.

Question: If I may, let me go back a little to after, right after the liberation, because I think you've indicated that the, it was some months from the time you were liberated before the rest of the country was liberated. How did your life and your routine change during that time that the war was still raging in the northern part of the Netherlands?

Answer: Well, it was raging right on our doorstep. In fact it got so bad that uh they evacuated by they I mean the Allied commander evacuated the people in in our pocket of the countryside and they took over the farm and and made a communications center out of it. Uh Harry didn't like this at all because in these unsettled times he was afraid that people would steal whatever little he had left, but uh reluctantly he uh evacuated the family to a cousin of of his wife's. His name was Vilam Yosten (ph), who all of a sudden got uh a couple of dozen people on his doorstep because uh as I was saying several of Harry's relatives had had been not really hiding but living with us uh more or less openly uh to escape the famine, so uh it was amazing that this Vilam Yosten with with hardly any notice took on this whole troop of people. And we lived everywhere. I remember uh by we I mean all 24 or 25, 26 of us. Uh my family,

my mom, dad and I lived in an old pigsty. Uh again an interesting experience for a Jewish family. Uh my father was just millimeters short of six feet tall and he had the hardest time fitting into this pigsty but as I say it rained steadily through that time, so we had to be somewhere inside, so we stayed in the pigsty and my dad squeezed himself into it the best he could and uh continued with his usual pursuits. He always had a little notebook of some kind and I still can picture him sitting there and on some straw that we had put on the ground, making notes to himself and I uh dragged in one of my best finds uh a soldier who had gotten so excited at finding a a little urchin that spoke English and turned out to be a Jewish urchin, that he had come, had to absolutely come and see the rest of the family. The soldier was literally delirious. His name was Godfrey Langdon (ph), also an older soldier who was fighting a very personal war. He was Jewish and we were the first actual honest-to-God Jewish people that he had come across in the territories that he liberated. And I later heard that he had been through all the African campaigns and the French Campaign and the Belgium Campaign, but I guess they were so busy fighting they never met any people. Or never liberated any people identifiable as Jews. This man absolutely opened up himself to us. He gave us everything he had and there were no limits. Uh anything that you mentioned he'd do. Although the one thing that we were the most scared to ask, because we had been told repeatedly not to ask, which is to use their communications network. And as I told you the countryside was in a shambles and my parents' relatives uh had and we knew they had escaped to the United States and and Britain. And we wanted in the worst way to find out how they were and to let them know that we had survived...

END OF TAPE

...which was rather worthy. They could only have supposed that we had not. And uh well he was in the signal corps and uh we took a chance. Uh we all took a chance, and he decided to adopt us as his relatives and write letters to his uh then newly acquired aunts and uncles telling telling them that his other relatives had had survived the war. And got away with it. And even in the midst of a battle zone we received uh letters from our relatives through military mail, even when he when his unit

moved on, he would sometimes trudge through the whole night just to deliver us letters and maybe a little \_\_\_\_\_ and get back to his unit. Even when he couldn't get leave he would do that instead of sleep. So this is how strongly some people felt and Godfrey Langdon stayed a friend till the day he died. I still have uh prayer books that he gave the family, so that we would have something something Jewish.

Question: Is there any other story that you'd like to tell us about the farm?

Answer: About the Yosten farm. Well the Yosten's were were also an amazingly hospitable people and they are still friends of ours to this day. Their farm if possible is even further outback than the Janssen farm, in that it is more remote although it was then and still is a lot more modern and uh I I really enjoyed farming with these people because uh because they they had scale to their to their outfit and they taught me how to milk and uh I helped them bring in the harvest. Uh I really I really did well in those days because I was just like a bird let out of a cage. I had to try everything and people responded to that. I still remember, you know everybody made a pet out of me. Uh the older Yosten daughters took me and as I said taught me how to milk and how to farm and I guess this is one reason that I went into agriculture. I'm a paper farmer. I I shuffle papers for the U.S. Department of Agriculture but I have a life long interest in farming.

Question: Can you tell me what happened to you and your family after liberation?

Answer: Well, we've touched on that some. My my mother finally uh after she buried my dad, made her way to Amsterdam, while I was in in under quarantine in the hospital in \_\_\_\_\_, which was really bad for me because I had I had been penned up long enough and you know here I had just been let free and loose and then they put me in a glass cage literally, and medical facilities at that time were extremely primitive still and they were afraid they had an epidemic on their hands. So uh they put me in quarantine and and fed me through a slot. And I was well by that

point when they when they started feeding me through the slot. I was well. They pushed books and food through there and for the rest they would just shout through the walls and that was the only contact I had with the outside world. A terrible time I had but uh Mrs. Graumann who really felt miserable most of the time rose to this occasion and she stuck around that hospital day and night to make sure I got taken care of while she was obviously also gripped by the fact that my mother had had to go bury her husband. Must have been a difficult position for my mother whether to go and go to my father's funeral and abandon her sick child or have the funeral occur without her and stay with the child. Well, she decided to go to the to the funeral. That in itself was was an amazing thing because my dad died among strangers. The only Jewish family in that little town uh that had come back took him in, and that also became a life-long friendship because uh shortly after they took him in, while he was waiting for the necessary travel papers to make the best of his trip north, he got si...he got very sick and died in a period of days, and here they had the body of this stranger on their hands whom they really didn't know much about except some rough idea where the rest of his family was. Well, the managed to find another returning uh Jewish person who had who had survived the camps, and uh that uh that person found the car and driver somewhere. How they managed that I don't know but they found their way through the rain, through the dark, to the impossible-to-find outback place where my mother was, and in the amazing short period of time of two days, and said you know, if you want to be at your husband's funeral, now is the time and they had to break the news to her. Well they took her back in the car. Managed to scrounge up enough gasoline and managed to bury my father within the ritual maximum length of time that you can keep a body out. I think it's three days. And uh they were very orthodox and didn't know how how we were oriented so they prepared everything for an orthodox funeral. In the midst of of a famine in the war zone, they were extremely kind to strangers. After all these people had seen so much death that they were able to find the compassion to deal with one more death. It's amazing. But they did. They were super compassionate to my mother and she still can't get over today what hospitality and what uh what support she found in which obviously were complete strangers. But she made her way back to Amsterdam, and joined up with uh her friends \_\_\_\_\_ who had maintained contact more or less throughout the whole hiding period. In the parlance of the times they were called our periscope. We were



the submerged people, the underdikers (ph), the people in hiding, and the the imagery that was used, ima...imagery that was used was of a submarine so the people who knew where you were were your periscope. So she went to the periscope family who took her and then later when I came out of the hospital, me in also. They had a relatively small apartment but they made room for us. In fact I had my own room. They emptied out an attic room which I converted into my own little space and they had uh an apartment on the very last city canal in Amsterdam, so I could look out over the countryside and it was a good, quiet place for me to try to get my myself together.

Question: Continuing along that line, can you tell me how you came to the United States?

Answer: Well, as I indicated, my relatives on both sides of the family had uh in the last years when it was possible immigrated out of continental Europe. My father's family had gone to London and we visit them, visited them within the first say twelve months of the time that we got back to Amsterdam. But my mother really wanted to go to her side of the family, which was uh in America. I didn't want to go but once again people paid no attention to me whatsoever, to what I wanted. I just was glad to get back to my old neighborhood and try to make contact with my old friends which wasn't easy because I hadn't seen them for three, more than three years and for a kid that's a good chunk of his life. And uh it was very hard to make contact back with people whose lives had gone on while mine had stood still. And I was just starting to do that when my mom says we're packing up. We're going to the United States. This to me was bad news cause I had seen just enough wild west and gangster movies that I figured that's what the United States was inhabited by and I didn't want to live with the likes of Al Capone and Wild Bill Hickcock and uh so I I didn't uh like that at all. Uh they they told us in various letters that that wasn't really so. That there were really civilized places in the United States like New York and Cleveland, Ohio, where there were no gangsters, at least not that you could see them on a regular basis and uh no Indians whatsoever. And that people did such things as uh parents went to work and kids went to school and in their spare time make money selling newspapers. Well, selling newspapers. That really did it because only the poorest

of the very poor outcasts in western Europe of the time sold newspapers and to be told that I would be making money on the side selling newspapers was like bad news and I wasn't at all interested in going there and I didn't want to have anything to do with going to the United States. But my mother didn't have much of a choice. She was completely out of money and assets. She was out of energy. She was out of everything and she needed all the support that she could get from her family, so probably from her point of view she did wisely and and just moved to the United States, where we were received also very, with with open arms by our relatives. We lived with my mother's sister and her family, her husband and son, for al...almost two years in a very cramped apartment because remember they were just getting over being refugees themselves. My uncle migrated to the United States when he was in his sixties so he wasn't very employable, so he didn't make very much money and uh my aunt was making money doing sewing work on a piece, on a piece by piece basis. They call it piece work. So they weren't very well off. They lived in an apartment which was small already for them and then they had to take in two more people. In two years I never heard one unkind word. Like they must have gotten mad at me plenty of times cause I told you I was an urchin. I wasn't an easy kid to deal with. But they dealt with me patiently and lovingly and helped civilize me.

Question: Can you tell me a little bit about your life in America from the time that you came here, where you went to school, and what you ended up doing?

Answer: The beginning was very hard. Uh there were there were or if they were they weren't Jews, but we experienced no social service support at all. It was like there was no Jewish community in Cleveland from for all they did for the refugees that came in, from my personal experience. My personal experience with the with the Jewish social service agencies was awful. To the extent that they tried to help us they made things worse. Uh they welshed on every agreement that they ever made. Never came through with anything that we expected and we we didn't have anything further to do with them. So what happened is I was just dropped into a regular school, and what English that I knew was pigeon English and English English as we called it then, the American lingo was completely undecipherable

to me. If people talked to me face to face like you're doing with me right now I could understand them fairly well. I could ask questions if I didn't. In the class I couldn't understand anything. In fact frequently the only thing I understood all day long was the questions they asked me on the materials that they had just covered. Questions directed personally at me I could understand easier than lectures. I just couldn't understand, and it was I was totally frustrated and the adults were totally preoccupied making a living and I was the only little kid because as I said my uncle had his son living with him but he was a grown son. He had just come back from the war. He had his own problems. He had he had uh fought with the American Armies and was just trying to re-stabilize his life, so he didn't have time with me so here I was again, thrown completely on my own resources without anybody to talk to or anybody to help me over this very difficult adjustment to a to a society and the customs and a culture I knew nothing about. Uh I went to high school. Uh my second year uh I started I started in the ninth grade which was then in junior high school, but most of my experience was in high school and especially in high school the kids just cut me cold. They were nouveau riche uh American Jewish kids and they didn't want to have anything to do with uh with refugees. And uh the only way in which I made contact was through a drama club and since all of us were acting then and since I was acting all the time anyway I could fit in there. And that's how I got to know some kids my own age and and started making friends, so the drama club was my salvation. I was never a very good actor in the sense of being a thespian but I was a very enthusiastic member of the of the drama club, and thespian is a good word to use because the honor society in that community was called the Thespian Society, and the day that they made me a Thespian I knew that I had arrived in some area that I really wanted to be in. After that uh I kind of drifted into college and then drifted into Israel, thinking that maybe that's where I'd like to be, but I didn't feel comfortable there either and besides the U.S. government was sending me threatening letters that if I didn't come back they would call me a draft dodger because at that time everybody had to go into the into the Army, so I came back and I was promptly drafted into the Army, and uh after that I went to graduate school and started working for agricultural companies doing writing, public relations, information type work which I am still doing this day. My mother benefitted from the fact that she had been everything for my dad in the time that he operated his own

business and gave all those lectures and talks and presentations. She absorbed enough art history so that uh even though she had no formal education at all she was raised to be uh a lady. She was raised to be a hostess and an entertainer and a manager of servants, not to live in a poor neighborhood in the United States. But uh this way she was able to get the job in the library in an art museum and that's the kind of work she still does today.

Question: Mr. Heppner, I understand you have some photographs and artifacts that uh you brought along with you that we'd like to see, we'd appreciate...

Answer: You'd like to do that now.

Question: Thank you very much for the interview.

#### TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

Answer: This map gives a quick summary of where we were geographically during the time of of the greatest Nazi persecution. It tells you that we left on August 9th....

#### TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

This map gives you a quick overview of where we were during the height of the Nazi persecution, leaving Amsterdam on August 9<sup>th</sup> in uh '42...

#### TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

This map gives you a quick overview of where we were during the height of the Nazi persecution, leaving Amsterdam on August 9th, 1942, spending a brief time near \_\_\_\_\_ where we left on September 1st, then moving further south to the east of

\_\_\_\_\_ where we stayed until September 9th, 1942, finally winding up in the out back east of Durna in a little berg called \_\_\_\_\_ where we spent the time between September 10th, '42 and our liberation day, September 24th, 1944.

#### TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

I made this drawing when I was eight years old and when I was in hiding, well, maybe nine, of the rear view of the Janssen farm. Of course that's the view that I had because we had to be hidden from view from the street. You can see my father sitting in the barn that was being built there. You can see the peat stack behind that from our point of view, and the chicken house where the five of us hid for the two year period and then the main house which was both the stable and the living quarters for the Janssen family.

#### TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

This is a picture of the Janssen family, the family that sheltered us for more than two years during the height of the Nazi persecution. It was taken twenty years after liberation and the two principal people, Harry Janssen and his wife Nina are the ones that have the little kids on their laps. In between is \_\_\_\_\_, a daughter of theirs who was born while we were there and whose name is very significant to us because she was named after the young boy of the Graumann's who was killed while trying to reach the shelter that the Janssens provided.

#### TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

This hat was made for me by some soldiers in a Scotch uh platoon who were encamped near the farm where I was living shortly after liberation. They kind of made a mascot out of me and I was their buddy, the only kid around, the only person around really that uh spoke any English so I hung around with them practically day and night and that was to show that I belonged. A hat just like all the other soldiers were wearing.

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

END OF TAPE