

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Carla Heijmans Lessing

May 29, 1990

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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Carla Heijmans Lessing, conducted by Linda Kuzmack on May 29, 1990 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and 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 interview cannot be used for sale in the Museum Shop. The interview cannot be used by a third party for creation of a work for commercial sale.

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CARLA HEIJMANS LESSING

May 29, 1990

Q: Would you tell me your name please?

A: Carla Lessing.

Q: Where and when were you born?

A: I was born in Rotterdam, Holland uh on November 4th, 1929. (laughter) I have to think about this.

Q: Tell me about your parents, your early childhood.

A: OK. Uh, let me tell you first about my father's family. They are Heijmans and most of the family uh lived in the eastern part of Holland. My father's father was Dutch and my father's mother was a German Jew and her name was Rosalie, and my father's father was Jacob. Uh they had three children. Uh I think my father was the oldest, then my aunt who died in Auschwitz, and a younger brother who died of diabetes in 1922, '24 - I don't know exactly and his name was Herman. Uh my father met my mother in Germany and my mother is, was a German Jew. She grew up in the western part of Germany and she was one of three. Uh she was the middle child. Her older brother, Rudie, immigrated to Israel¹ in 1935. Uh my mother married my father in 1925 and moved to Holland. Uh my youngest brother, her youngest...my youngest uncle, her youngest brother, immigrated in 1934 or '5 to Holland and he uh studied in Germany, so there's a lot of German in my family. Uh...my parents settled in Rotterdam uh when they got married in 1925. My brother, Herman, uh who is now called Johanem (ph) who lives in Israel, was born in August 1926 and I was born in November 1929 also in Rotterdam. In 1930 they moved to the Hague to get away from my mother's in-laws who were very intrusive. My father's sister had already moved away from Rotterdam because of the same reason and they moved in a little suburb near the Hague. Uh now the story about my parents' financial problems are very vague because nobody told me and my father died in...actually he committed suicide in 1936. Before he died, they moved from a big house in the Hague to a very small apartment or small apartment and I was sent to my grandparents in Germany. My grandparents lived in Germany in Gelsenkirchen (ph). My brother who was going to school at that time stayed with my parents and later on with my mother and I was sent away because moving and the problems so I, I was in Germany in 1935 and 1936 as a youngster before I went to school. So there is a big difference. At that time already Jews were very careful. I was a little girl and when I was on the street, my grandparents would say, don't speak too loudly, uh don't hop, don't skip, uh uh don't make yourself noticed because there were all the Nazis around us and so at a very early age I was already aware that I was different, that I was Jewish, I shouldn't be noticed, should be quiet. (Cough) Also my grandparents did all kinds of things to be Jews. I mean they were not

¹ Palestine

really religious but they would go to the synagogue because they felt as a Jew you needed to stay together. So I had to go to the synagogue on the sabbath_ and uh participate. So I went back to Holland probably in April, May of 1936. I spoke German at that time because I, my grandparents spoke German. I came back and my mother sent me to school, kindergarten uh for me to quickly pick up the Dutch and I went to kindergarten and then to first grade. I then came to a new apartment because I had moved...when I left for Germany I had lived in a big house and I came to an apartment, and my father wasn't there. So...and my mother was a widow and uh had a very hard time making money and so we were very poor. Uh my mother and my brother and I did go back and forth to Germany. For my school vacations I would go to Germany so my mother had some free time I guess. And so in 1936, in 1937, in 1938 I spent my vacations in Germany with my grandparents, and kind of was aware of what was happening then. So...and my mother would be taking jewelry from Germany to Holland when she would bring us and she would hang herself up with jewelry from my grandparents and from other families and so there was already kind of a preparation for, you know, saving some money or some jewels or whatever it was. Also some of my grandmother's family uh were immigrating to the United States and they came to Holland, so we had families coming through before they boarded the boat in Rotterdam to the United States. So we were kind of prepared for all this. Uh I was...go back to my school days...I was one of two in my class who was Jewish. There was another boy who was Jewish, and the Dutch were very good at uh respecting the Jews so when the Princess Beatrice was born and all the Dutch school children got uh ____ (ph) ____ (ph) with some orange sprinkles on it, they got for the Jewish children kosher ____ (ph) with butter on it. So they were very, you know, we were very well respected. Uh I had around the corner where I lived was my _____. She was my best friend who was also Jewish and we did play a whole lot together. Uh and so up until 19...1940, until the war broke out in Holland, we we were pretty I guess comfortable there as assimilated Jews and there was nothing too much going on except that I knew and my mother knew and my brother knew what was going on in Germany and anytime it could come. So when the war broke out on May 5th, uh it was kind of anticipated but still a terrible shock. What happened on that day was that...or like my husband said early in the morning the planes flew over and we were, I was certainly petrified. They came very low. We didn't know what was going on. Uh and there was bombing in, I guess in the norther part of the Hague. I was still in the Hague then and then we had heard the bombing. We had heard, we could hear the bombing in Rotterdam, and I, I know I was petrified. I was absolutely petrified. Uh it was over in five days and uh kind of we tried to resume our lives but that kind of...very slowly all kinds of laws against the Jews. We were uh started up and we were limited, limited a little bit more and more and more. Uh what you had to do first was you had to go to some office and of course I didn't go because I was a child, where you had to sign in and you had to sign in and write exactly how many Jewish grandparents you had. So my mother went there and she had four Jewish grandparents and she wrote this in and I had four Jewish grandparents and my brother had four Jewish grandparents and we were signed up and wonderful for the Jews...they could find us any time. And uh I still went to school for one year but in the same school that I went to uh originally uh but feeling a little different because every time there were some other things happening to us like uh you had to bring uh in your gold and any kind of jewelry and you had to bring it in or your had to bring in your

bike. Small things all the time were, were asked to bring into the offices and give them, you know. Uh now since we were very poor and I had gotten a bike from, a second-hand bike from friends of ours and my brother had a bike and so we took the bikes but my bike was a small bike, small-sized bike and they didn't want it, so I came back with a bike, but since none of my Jewish friends had bikes, I couldn't ride my bike, so uh my mother was already a little cleaver because she had seen what happened in Germany, uh was hiding some of gold rings and some things already. Now, to back-track a little bit...my grandparents were in Germany in the Kristallnacht and they got out, I believe in July or August of 1939, and they settled with my uncle in the western part of Holland. Uh they came with maybe eight guildens and they were very well-to-do German Jews in in in _____ and uh they had, they gave ever....they had to give everything away and they came with no money. Uh so they came to Holland and they lived with my youngest uncle who took care of them the rest of their lives. Uh at the end of 1941, we heard we couldn't go back to the schools again and that they would organize a Jewish school maybe three-quarters of an hour away from us in _____ and that we had to sign up there. So all the Jewish kids in the neighborhood like my friend and her brother and myself and my brother and some friends would go to that particular school that was organized, and I couldn't say goodbye to my friends in the previous school, so in, I believe in September or so of 1941 we all walked...we kind of started walking and we picked up these kids up to go to school because it took us quite a while. Now I remember that as a very good time because we were together. It was like uh a family and everybody knew kind of what was up and and that year in school although at the end of that school year people disappeared. It was very strange. People kind of disappeared. Now...and we never knew what happened...if they were picked up or they fled or they went into hiding, so sometimes we came to school and there were less people. Now at, towards the end of that school year uh it became very evident that we probably would not go back to school anymore there because that was when in Amsterdam they started to uh pick up people and sent them on the trains and uh so...

LONG PAUSE - TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

Q: OK. We're back on.

A: I was...I guess I was talking about that uh...the year in the Jewish school was kind of a wonderful year with uh...but at the end of that school year people kind of disappeared and we didn't know where they went, if they were picked up or if they were fleeing to uh Belgium, France, wherever to...or if they went into hiding. Uh also during that year we were supposed to, we were supposed to...we had to wear the Jewish star. And so uh we walked around with the Jewish star. We were...could not go into the trolley car. We couldn't do actually anything very much. Uh and somehow in order to deal with all this, I became pretty proud of wearing it. I guess it was like a...dealing with something that was horrible was kind of turning it around and saying I'm proud to be a Jew. Now my mother was not a religious Jew, uh but my brother did become bar mitzvahed and once in a while we had to go to the synagogue, but we were not religious really so...but we were very Jewish. We uh...I...in Holland I was very dark, very dark hair and uh I looked very Jewish. So did my mother who had black hair

and black eyes and looked very Jewish. My brother, he was blond at that time and he did look less Jewish, but we were different. Now what was also different is that my mother was a German Jew and she uh had a very strong German accent. She also had a whole lot of contact with German Jews who had fled Germany in 1939 and uh '38 and uh so she knew a whole lot of stories what had gone on uh in Germany and we were kind of aware because these people were terrible displaced, these German Jews. Uh what happened in kind of...I...I got...in June, July, we kind of were informed that the first people in the Hague would be shipped and these were the young men, sixteen years and older uh to work camps. Now my mother had a friend uh who told her that there was a Catholic priest who would help her find a place for my brother. My mother had said we don't...we don't go to Poland. That's too far away. Uh and she kind of had made up her mind that's too far away. You don't go with your whole family too far away. I mean you don't...you just don't do that. And since she had already a little bit experience how to defy the Germans like, you know, getting money and jewelry out of Germany, she knew kind of how to do things. I think she was not as afraid as most of them. Anyway, the Catholic priest came to our house and that was very unusual because we had never had contact with any Catholic priest and he was uh from St., from St. Francis...St. Fransican I guess...he was in kind of in garb. He didn't have a suit on and he was in sandals so he was quite different and he was...and I don't know if he was an older man or a younger man, but he was a very, very lively man and made us feel very much at ease and he said that he had a woman in the Hague who would take my brother. And he told us that this woman wanted to do some good because she had sinned so much in her life that...and was very fearful that she would go to hell and that by rescuing or taking in a Jewish man, maybe she would go to heaven. So that was the very beginning from our uh we planning to go in hiding. Now uh what happened was very, very quickly is that we thought that my brother was going to be called up to go but very quickly afterwards we found out that my mother and myself would go...had to go to. Now what they did was, in the Hague certainly, uh you would get an announcement in the mail or with your name on it and you were supposed to go at twelve midnight to the trolley car. Trolley car would take you to the train in the Hague and the train, trains would take you to Restabourk (ph), the Dutch concentration camp. That was apparently the gathering point. That was the instructions. Uh so my brother had kind of a place where he could go and so when we heard that we might need to go too, my mother contacted the Catholic priest again and said, you know, we have to go too. We can't, you know, look, we almost, we almost have to go. So he went to the woman and said could the mother and the sister come too, and she kind of agreed. So we had a place to go. Now we had to go from our house and walk to the place where we went into hiding. You're not supposed to walk after eight o'clock in the dark at night anywhere. So...and I don't know exactly how this was all done but I remember that I walked out of the house with my star on, and I was instructed at some point to take my little vest off and throw it into the uh gut...not in the gutter...it's in the uh...sewer. And for me that was just more fun...it's almost like you shed your identity. And and I don't know if I walked alone or with my mother and my brother. I have no idea. I kind of...I don't know what we took. I...I was asked if I took any toys or any books. I don't know. I think we went with a little bit of stuff and we went to the place where we were into hiding, went into hiding. Uh it appeared that my mother had already taken some paintings and her silver and her chinawear and some other stuff...had

already...it had already disappeared. She had already taken care of it...it went into some place, hiding with some friends. So we, my mother, my brother and I went to this first hiding place. It was in August of 1942. Uh we had to go one flight up and there was a very small apartment. It was a tiny little bedroom, a living room, another room and a closed-in porch, a tiny little kitchen and a bathroom, and then the next...it was...it was in...uh the person who lived upstairs went on the same staircase, uh the same hallway up to the next story. We got the back room with the little porch. It was closed-in porch, and everything was dark and heavily upholstered and curtains were drawn and there were kind of two beds and a table and I don't know what...and there we were. And we were told that we had to whisper and we were told that we could not go to the bathroom as we wanted because the person upstairs would hear the flushing and there was three more people in the household of Mrs. Noen and her son or and...she had a foster son ____ (ph) so we had to be very quiet and uh actually do nothing. Uh my brother right away got asthma attacks and uh he could not cough because the neighbors on the left and the neighbors on the...no...the neighbors upstairs and the shopkeepers downstairs could hear it, so he had to cough underneath his blanket and that didn't, you know, he didn't get any better so that was horrendous. I mean it...you know, people have asthma and they almost, you know, choke and die and that was horrible because he was in a very dusty room with the heavy, heavy upholstery, and and the curtains. Uh and we were all, all three of us were thrown together and it was horrible. We didn't know what to do. We tried to play games and it didn't work out. Uh we invented all kinds of things and we kind of turned around each other. It was just absolutely horrible time. Uh what happened was that the woman who hid us became extremely anxious. She couldn't sleep at night. She, she didn't know what to do with herself. She was so afraid that that she would be caught and instead of this plan that she had that she would go to heaven, she would be shot, you know, because she was hiding Jews. So her son concocted some kind of a plan to get us out and my mother...our contact person was a friend of my mother's who was not Jewish and that was our contact person from the outside world. And actually we never kind of found out what happened exactly but we got a letter uh saying that some people knew where we were and we had to come up with some money and we had to leave. Now the son had married...I guess he can live in the house...had married and was...I had some little rings and some little jewelry. My mother had some and he had saved that for us and we never got it back. Uh he also said he needed some money and we had to find some money and I don't know where my mother got the money. We had to give that to him for some reason. It was all very strange, but we were so powerless that we did everything they asked us to do and anyway the priest was contacted again and he found us another place in Delft and we left. We were there from August whatever until November 29th of '42. Uh we were, we had to go on the trolley car. We had to go on the train to Delft. Now since we hadn't been outside for three months to walk out and to go on the trolley car and to go on the train was the most awful thing because you exposed yourself and we were so afraid we'd got caught. At the end of the train ride, which was very short, we were going to meet somebody. We didn't know who it was. So we did that and we met this Mr. Faheine (ph) at, in Delft. Uh now what the good thing about this being black-mailed and and that whole story was that what we didn't know was that the lady who lived upstairs from where we were hiding had hid a whole lot of stuff for Jewish people. Chinawear, silver...not ours, somebody else's...and she was caught, so what

happened was a couple of months after we had left, the Germans found out that she had stored stuff and came into the apartments, you know, looked over, you know, looked through all the apartments, the apartment where we had been hiding and upstairs and so actually that whole plan of this son to free his mother from all this anxiety was to our advantage because we would have been caught and we would not be here. We uh we went to Delft to this family and this man took us to his family and we found out that this was a family, a father, mother and seven children, and we all...the youngest child was two, and the oldest child was like eighteen. And the house, you cannot believe how small the house was and he had promised that he would take us in for a while and we got some room and there was no way that we could escape ever. I mean it was all very small and all, all very tight. The houses were built very close together and we could not escape to the roof or to the basement. There was no escape here also. We were there and we could not go too near the windows. We could not flush the toilets. We could not walk really because downstairs they had a barber shop and she had a beauty parlor downstairs, so we were not supposed to be really there so we couldn't do anything uh so you had to kind of walk on your stocking feet and you couldn't really go to the bathroom because it was too much flushing. Uh it would all be suspicious. We could not be near the window because the streets in Delft are very narrow and the people across the street could just see you. Just, you know, so that was also not the best place to hide. Uh the man who hid us, Mr. Faheine (ph), was an extraordinary man because on Sundays, three more Jewish men came, would come to visit. They were hiding somewhere in Delft and he would kind of bring them in and have a Sunday meal and then there was some uh...and you know, it was all very small but he kind of wanted to help these people. Uh we didn't know these people, but you know, they were...other people were hiding them. Now one of these three men we found out while we were there that he was caught uh traveling and was shot. Uh the other two men we don't know what happened to them. Uh the seven children never let anybody know that we were there. Now they went to school, right, they went...and I don't think they were told, you know, specifically that they don't tell anyone that, you know, we have people in hiding here. I don't think so. They kind of knew. Uh...I'm trying to think a little bit what happened there...all kinds of things happened uh uh while we were there. Now this was from like say December of...December '42 until May '45 we were there, so during that time uh things happened in Delft such as uh...I don't think I can recall logically, but uh the Germans were looking for blankets, right? They needed blankets for I don't know for what and so we heard that they would come to the house, to the house, right, and search the house for blankets. Now as soon as something like that came through we had to go somewhere, or they would, we would hear that all men over sixteen would have to go to workcamps and so in that family my brother was over sixteen and two more were over sixteen years old so they would...we had to do something. All the time something like that would happen and we had to find a solution and not be with...this family had to find a solution for us, so one time we stayed for three days in a Catholic church. The Catholic church was around the corner. Early in the morning we would walk to the Catholic church, sit through the mass, stay in a in a room. Every Mass that was we went to. We had pennies, you know, to put in and and that was for us kind of, you know, it was like a beautiful show because it was music and colorful and and...and it was spacious and uh we felt we would not be caught there. For some reason that was neutral ground and we wouldn't be caught there.

One time...I forgot what the reason was...we had to also leave that house and we would, and I forgot what the reason was...we had to stay with people uh also two blocks away. Now what we did during the time that we were hiding, we would knit a lot. My mother would knit socks for the whole family and so while we had to leave the house and went two blocks away to another family, she took her knitting along but very close to the house she lost the yarn, so we walked and the yarn unwound and, you know, the whole path with the yarn behind her (laughter) and we found it _____ very funny. Anyway we...she...I don't know...retrieved it, but, you know, it was like...and we stayed with a young family and with that young family there was also a Jew hiding from Amsterdam, an investment banker, and for us that was like wonderful because we had some other people to talk to and somebody who was in the same position we were in and uh uh it was kind of a diversion from the usual life we had. Uh I don't know how long we stayed there. Not very long, and we went back again. Another time they were looking for a man who was sixteen years old and my uh brother and the other two males would go to another house where they had built a uh fake wall, and what they would do if the houses would be searched, the men would go behind the fake wall. Now, again my brother went and he thought it was terrific because you could go somewhere else and he played cards and until there was, you know, there was a sign that they had to hide and these kind of diversions were kind of a relief for our, you know, just staying in the house and not doing very much. Uh we did some cooking and some sewing and some knitting and some playing Monopoly and... playing a lot of Monopoly. I know that that we were not as tense in that family as in the previous family because there was a little bit more room and a little bit more uh...there were more people so we had uh but the woman we were hiding with, Mrs. _____, was also extremely anxious. I mean you just can't imagine if we would be caught. Her husband would be...who knows, you know, so she was extremely anxious and she became sick. I mean she really became sick...physical illness but I think it was probably uh due to some of the anxiety that she experienced in fearing that that something might happen to her whole family. She was sick for months, so...and she had really no place...it was such a small house and she was lying in the living room. It was horrendous. Uh now in that family, only two of their relatives knew that we were there. Her sister and his brother, and nobody else knew that we were there. Now in the Dutch families, on Sundays everybody gathers always on Sundays, right. Sunday meal. They just come by to say hello to every...Sunday was horrendous for us because we had to stay in an upstairs little room almost all Sunday and couldn't get out because the family was downstairs and they shouldn't see us. Uh what happened uh...

Q: What did you do when you were up there?

A: I don't think very much. I mean you either sat...we knitted maybe. My brother...I don't know. I don't know. We didn't do very much. We did read. Uh but again we uh, the oldest daughter would go to the library for us, but she couldn't get enough books for us. I mean we could read three books a day or, you know, easily, all of us. But she would get just a few books, so we read. We read. But there was never enough because we, you know, she couldn't get enough books and there were no books in the house. There was no library. They were...the husband was a barber and she was a beautician. They were not educated people. There were

no books in the house really, so we...I guess we played Monopoly. We read a little bit. We uh...I don't know, I can't...we did...my mother and I would peel potatoes, you know, and and clean vegetables and do some cooking and do darning and so on. My brother had it much more difficult. Uh there was very little food. Uh we uh...my hiding father as we called him, would would get some food from the farmers because we were on the uh market right there and since he was a barber the farmers would come for a shave, and he would do some dealing with them, so he would get some vegetables and some fresh potatoes and we would get some food. Also he was really remarkable. He loved to uh get...defy the authority. I mean that was his whole task there. I mean he loved it, so we had uh ration cards, but he had for everybody two, so we had...there were twelve fam...twelve people in the house. He had twenty-four. So he, we had a little bit of more food than usual but still there was hardly any food in the house and so there was a whole lot of tension about food in the house because you cook for twelve people and and uh divide it up. It was very difficult and especially for the hiding mother because she had her own children and us and it was horrendous and they were all growing people, you know...they were all, like I said, from two to eighteen and I was like thirteen, fourteen. My brother was sixteen, seventeen. I mean you could eat enormous amount of food. There was a lot of tension around food. Uh what happened...I think in 1944...uh the hiding mother's youngest sister was pregnant and she needed some help and she asked me or my mother or somebody if I could help her. That meant that I had to go from the place where I was hiding to her house and uh for me again it was something different, but I think you, you kind of learn to take a deep breathe and you walk and you hope nothing will happen, so I had to walk from the place I was hiding to her house, and then I slept overnight. I don't know how long it was, but I walked on the street there. I hadn't walked on the street for a long time all by myself. And uh I stayed there and I don't know how long - maybe a few weeks or a few months and helped her, which was was a welcomed changed but there was also this fear that maybe my mother and my brother would be caught or that I would be caught, so...I mean...it was very very tense is all I can say and very fearful. I was always very fearful. The worst fear that I had, and I can't tell for my mother and my brother, that at night when there would be trucks coming through the streets, you would just lay in bed and you would just wait and you always anticipated that that truck would stop in front of the house you were hiding in. The Germans would come out, bang on the door and would get us, find us, and so trucks were like you would just lying in bed and if you heard some noise you kind of hold it, and since we had no place to flee...most people, some people had, in their hiding place, had another hiding place where they thought they would be safer. We had nothing. Absolutely nothing to run to or to hide in. Nothing. So we were exposed and everything. Uh this didn't happen, you know. But there were many instances that the Germans would come in the barber shop and would ask for a shave and the man who hid us would have to shave the German soldiers and we would be upstairs and we would never know if they wanted to go to the bathroom or not, you know, because the bathroom was upstairs, so uh I can't really tell you exactly how frightened we were. I can't also tell you what we did because it's like one day was like the other and also you didn't really want to think because you would hear things. We would get some bits of information and uh they were all, like, you know, this man was caught and this man was caught and this family was caught. You would hear that and we didn't really want to believe it because we hoped it

wasn't true and we would maybe be next. We did have false identity cards. Uh we got them through another contact uh and again this was made uh so that we would...somehow we always felt guilty that somebody did something for us. What happened is people would come to us and they had in their rain...raincoats all the paraphernalia to make false identity cards. Now uh they would come to us and they would go on the train, and if they would be caught they would leave the raincoats there, but anyway they came to our house where we were hiding and would...gave us the...they did the whole thing with the stamping and the fingerprints and the whole thing. But it was always what if they were caught. It would be because of us, because they came to us to give us identity cards, and this really was like constantly that we would feel so guilty that people were helping us. And that their lives was at...their lives were just uh in danger just like us and and everyone of them who knew about us, their life was in danger. Uh I remember that we didn't have any fuel and I was to go with one of the...two of the children go to the road where there were little pieces of coal in the in the road deck (ph) and we would go there and I was asked also to go because...well, I would dress up like any little Dutch girl with a kerchief on and wooden shoes and we would go to the roadway and find little pieces of coal so we could have some fuel for a very little stove, so I could get out. My brother never got out because he was of the age that uh like, you know, they needed him in in the work camps. Now one of the things that was...I'm glad that I remembered it...one of the most awful things happened in this family was that their oldest son was called up to go to a work camp. And there we were. We were hiding with them, and he had to make a decision to go or not to go. What meant was if he wasn't going to go, we had to leave because if he was going to go in hiding they were going to look for him and if he was going to go to Germany to work camp, we would be...they were not going to look for him, so we would be more or less safe. This man was a very religious Catholic and he decided that he was going to go to the work camp. And I don't know what date that was. So he went and we stayed. And we had no dealing at all in his decision making but again we felt like he did it for us, because if he had decided not to go, we had to find another place and that was very difficult. So he went and they didn't get very much mail from him, so there was this constant kind of hanging over us - if he would die, he would die for us and and so we, you know, you put this all together...denial is a wonderful thing...so we kind of lived with it and everybody else was there. Their daughter had married in the end of 1944, but all the other five children were there, so the daughter was married, he was in a work camp in Germany and the five children were there. But he wasn't there, so we were daily reminded...Walter was his name...wasn't there. He did come back from the work camp, but I always felt for years and years that guilt that I had sent him to a work camp and we did some corresponding and he said that part of his decision was adventure, but he suffered. Actually he never did very well after he came back. He was like always extremely nervous and he retired early. Now we don't know if it was due to his experience in the work camp and just like we don't know what our...if our our problems are because of the Holocaust or just maybe just, you know, problems. But I think his experiences in the work camp were horrendous and uh he he did come back, so that was...but the guilt of having...for him to make a decision to go to Germany never left me, up until we corresponded, which was only a few years ago. Uh of course the whole thing with uh...we thought that autumn, that we would be liberated in September of 1944 and we weren't and we had had such big hopes that we would be

liberated and we had to go through the whole winter which was the hunger winter in Holland...there was no food...and I think we were all pretty depressed. Uh we would ask how long...when will it be over, and he would say, the hiding father would say to me, and another day would go by...how long is it going to take and he would say soon, so we kind of...you know...anyway the uh we were liberated in May the 5th. That winter was the most horrendous winter because people died of hunger. Uh we just made it. There was food until the last day and then the food was over (ph). Now I remember that I did not want to believe everyone that we were liberated because I did not want to be disappointed. I didn't believe it. They would say...you know, we we heard that we were going to be lib...that we were liberated in May and I said no, it's not true. It's not true. I'm not going to go outside because...and everybody was kind of flocking...you know, going outside. Ah, we are liberated...and I...and they couldn't get me out because I...first of all I was afraid to go out but second of all I thought maybe if it isn't true, it's going to be worse. So they had to kind of drag me out, to the outside, and then there was, it was...we were uh really liberated. Uh we stayed for quite a few weeks in, with the family and then my mother found an apartment in in in the Hague and went back to the Hague where we originally lived. Uh...uh...(pause) I can only tell tell you what happened afterwards a little bit is that my brother was...a couple of months later was drafted into the...was supposed to be drafted into the Dutch army to fight in Indonesia so here we had already joined a Zionist organization and he decided to go illegally to Israel because he didn't want to go to Indonesia and fight or go into the Dutch army so my...we had been together for thirty-three months in very small quarters and my brother left, early '46 he left for Israel and we didn't see him for many years because, you know, we stayed in Holland for a few years. Uh now my grandparents and my uncle went also into hiding in the eastern part of Holland and they were in a barn on a farm and they were...they were caught the week before the end of the war, but the Germans didn't know what to do with them because they were in such a mess at that time and they put them in prison in in nearby village and kind of left them there while they fled and so they were saved. So my uncle, my my uh my uh grandparents survived also. My aunt, my fraternal aunt, uncle and cousins all died and uh one cousin who was about twenty years old uh had a uh extensive stamp collection and he sold his stamp collection in 1942, and with that money he wanted to buy himself out of Holland. You know, you could, for a whole lot of money you could leave the country. They would get you over the border and over another border and so he did that and uh and I don't how much money but he was caught on the border of Holland and he was shot right there. He was killed uh very early also, in '42, '43. My uh oldest cousin uh married in 1942 her fiancé. That's what people did...they married...they didn't want to be separated so what they did they married and then so that they could go together who knows where, and so my uh oldest cousin married and she died in a concentration camp. Her husband also died in a concentration camp, and then my, her mother, her father and her youngest sister all went, in December 1943, which was pretty late, uh to the Dutch camp, concentration camp Restabourk. Three days later they were sent to Auschwitz and my aunt and my youngest cousin died three days later and my uncle we don't know, and that whole family was wiped out. Uh of my friends or my mother's friends, hardly anyone uh was saved. One very close friend of my mother's survived. Uh her whole sister's family, husband and children, all died. My mother's uh two other families, best friends and relations, all died...all left and died.

Uh uh one of my best friends survived with her whole family which was very unusual. But when we returned, I mean when we returned to the Hague we found this all out and it was like horrendous because we thought...we didn't find back what we had left. We found nothing, that's what it was and we had to start our lives all over again and so what one thing we did was join the Zionist organization to kind of have something that belonged to us, you know, that was...we could relate to these people because either they had been in hiding or they, because they were Jewish. We uh...I met my husband in the Zionist organization and he uh had promised his parents that he would help them settle in the United States, and he went in uh 1947, he went _____ in '47 went to the United States while I finished my schooling. Now important to know is that our schooling was interrupted. I had finished elementary school and when I was, came out of hiding I was fifteen years old and had no high school, so after the war I went to evening high school and I went to during the day I went to school for home economics. Uh but I mean the evening high school was like not very much and so that part uh you know, not having any really good education was terribly interrupted.

Q:when did you come to USA ?

A: Well, we came twice because I joined then my fiance in 1949, early, in January of '49 I came to the States with my mother. Uh and we got married in '49. We left in uh '41, '51 for Israel, because our plan was really always uh always to go to Israel. We went to Israel for five years but my husband's family was here in the States and he had no one in Israel, so in 1955 we went to Holland and stayed in Holland for a year and came back in 1956 to the United States. Now my brother remained in Israel and has a big family. He's married, has four children. Uh one of them died in the war with Lebanon. His oldest son died, and that was...we were kind of rebuilding our family and this was the first death in the family. Uh so we came back in '56. Now my daughter was born in Israel in 1951 and my son was born in 1958 in uh in the United States. Uh and we settled in West Chester.

Q: I thank you very much.

A: You are welcomed.

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION