

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**Interview with Edward Lessing  
May 29, 1990  
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## **PREFACE**

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Edward 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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## **EDWARD LESSING**

### **May 29, 1990**

Q: Would you tell me your name please?

A: My name is Edward Lessing or I was born Eleazar Lessing.

Q: Where and when were you born?

A: I was born in The Hague in Holland in the 8th of May, 1926. I was born in a Catholic hospital. I like to say I was born in Bethlehem because that was the name of the hospital.

Q: Tell me about your family, will you?

A: Well, how far back do you want me to go?

Q: To your childhood. I'd like to know about your parents, your grandparents, if you will, and your earliest memories.

A: Well, I would like to introduce you to my family as far back as my great grandfather in a hurry? My great grandfather...his name was Jacob. Jacob Lessing was a tailor in the ghetto in Amsterdam. He had a nickname. He was called Uncle Kool. He was an interesting, colorful character. And he had let me see. He had a whole bunch of children, but my grandfather was also a tailor. His name was Isaac. There was Jacob, my great grandfather; Isaac was my grandfather. My grandfather was also a tailor, but he was the first one to move out of the ghetto in Amsterdam and set up a tailor shop outside the ghetto in what was then one of the newer sections of Amsterdam which is now right in the heart of course. And he moved around quite a bit. He moved with his family to The Hague right near the Royal Palace of the Queen and many of his clients were barons and baronesses of the Court for a while there. So he was a tailor all his life. Later on he became an important man in one of the big clothing industries of Holland. He was the first one to set up a assembly line kind of procedures. So essentially, he was a tailor. He had three sons. My father, Nathan; his old brother, Jacob; and my father's youngest brother, Joseph. They all had different nicknames though. My father called himself Nardus. I don't know how he got to that. I never found that out. N-A-R-D-U=S. Nardus. And Jacob was called Jaap, which is a Dutch name, Jaap. J-A-A-P, Jaap. And Joseph was called Joop, J-O-O-P. Jacob died before the war. Joseph was killed by the Germans. So was his wife, Jeana and their little son, whose name I can't recall right now. In essence, those three people are the only ones in my family, my direct family...near family that were killed in concentration camps. Everyone else either had died before or died a natural death. So my father's older brother died

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before the war, and his younger brother died in a concentration camp in, I think, Auschwitz. So my father...oh, by the way, this younger brother, Joseph or Joop was also a tailor or went into the clothing industry, helped by my grandfather. My father was the only one who somehow or other got into a completely different profession. He became a musician. And when he was 17 he left his parental house...home, and from what I can find out he never returned. He booked on or he signed on a ship as a musician at 17, and it was his first trip overseas, and he never forgot it. He always told me about it. So he was a musician all his life. No matter what he tried to get out of it, he never...he never managed. He tried many things, together with my mother later on. They tried to set up businesses and sell things and it never worked. Papa always came back to being a musician. So let me say now...

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Q: Tell us about you as a child. What was your home like growing up as a child.

A: Well, it's a little difficult to tell you because my father and my mother married in 1925 and had me, of course, in 1926, and traveled around a lot. In 1929, for instance, my parents decided that they would go to the United States. They would follow in the path of my aunt and uncle who had moved there. They had moved. My aunt and uncle lived in Holyoke, Massachusetts, and my parents decided that that they also wanted to go to the United States. So 1929, I, as a three year old, arrived in the States, and learned to speak English. However, they had a lot of bad luck. 1929 wasn't a very good year to arrive in the States as you can imagine. So Pop had a hard time finding work and, in addition he got sick. He got tuberculosis, which ran in the family. Tuberculosis was a kind of a family disease with us. A lot of members had it...got it. My daughter got it. Pop got tuberculosis and had to go to a hospital. And Mom had to go and scrub floors and later worked in a travel agency in Boston. And I was farmed out to to a lady who was supposed to take care of me, but who took very badly care of me for one of the reason I have been in psychotherapy for the last 22 years is that [it] didn't help what happened later on [in] the war. So we moved to the States in 1932. Pop not finding work. Well, very occasionally, he had some friends in the Boston Symphony who helped with the summer engagement, but all in all he didn't find much work. In 1932 they moved back to Holland. In Holland they moved around from place to place, wherever Pop could find work. Pop worked as a musician mostly in night clubs, bars or restaurants, hotels, in the time that hotels still had live music, you know, little trios and... So we moved around quite a bit throughout Holland. I once counted that between the time that I was born and the war that we had...and the war was 1940, so it's between 1926 and 1940, that I once counted approximately 32 addresses. So that's a lot, you know. Some places, we may have been only...I don't know, a

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month so, but we had a lot of moving around. So my parents, as I said, came back in

1932 to Holland. Then Pop started playing and my mother had...my mother got three...three more children. One, another boy after me, died. His name was Joop...Joop again named after my grand...I guess great grandfather Jacob. Yeah. He died when he was 9 months. It was a terrible blow for my mother. And as my father said...a psychiatrist...he had consulted a psychiatrist because my mother was...was totally distraught. He said the best thing was to get Mother a child as quick as possible. She got two more children. Two...my two brothers, my brother, At, and my brother Fred. So there's a difference...a big difference between my brothers and me. The next my brother At is 8 years younger and my brother, Fred, is 10 years younger than I am. So I sort of stood alone most of the time. I was alone...a loner. We lived the last years before the war sort of in The Hague, Holland. And just before...a year before the war...I think 1939, with the help of my grandfather, who you may recall was a tailor, opened a clothing store in Delft, the nearby small town.

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Delft is located between The Hague and Rotterdam, a small town, a beautiful little town where Delft pottery comes from. So we moved there and that was...no I was going to say it was the last move before the ...that was the last move before the war, of course. So the war of 1940...the invasion, the German invasion found us in Delft with a sort of a small clothing store. And when the war broke out, I was 14, and my brother Fred was 4 and my brother At, was 6. Does that give you some background on my family? What else would you like me to go into at this point?

Q: Tell us what happened when the war broke out. Can you remember?

A: Yeah. Very well. I was 14. The war broke out 2 days after my birthday. My birthday was the 8th of May. I remember very well getting a canoe for my birthday because Delft is sometimes called the Venice of Holland. It's riddled with canals, little bridges. It's [a] very, very beautiful little town. I got the canoe on the 8th of May and I was very happy with that. It was my birthday. And on the 10th...that was the 8th of May, 1940. And on the 10th of May, 5 o'clock in the morning, I woke up to thunderous noises, machine gun fire, planes flying over. Great commotion. Dawn was just breaking. It was a most beautiful

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day. It was sun[ny], warm, unusual day for Holland in that sense. I went upstairs, looked out of the attic windows. The sky was full of planes. And some of the planes men were jumping with parachutes. I thought it was fabulous. It was wonderful. I tried to climb on the roof. Almost got shot down by Dutch machine nest which had been placed right near the hole by that time. My father ...my father retrieved me from the roof and said you shouldn't be doing this. I thought it was fabulous. I mean this was like stuff you'd see in the movies. I was 14 years old. What the Hell did I know? Besides, we hadn't the faintest

idea of what was going on really. We thought it was sort of an exercise of the Dutch, probably Dutch air force. No idea of what was going on. We soon found out, of course. By news that came from the radio that the Germans had invaded Holland. To give you a little background in this, Holland hadn't been in a war as far as I know since the Napoleonic war. Holland was neutral in the first world war. Matter of fact, I remember my father telling that in their home...at my grandfather's home, they had a Belgian refugee. Somebody from the first world war fled the battlefields in Belgium and come to Amsterdam and to The Hague and lived with them for a while. I think that was the most exotic story that happened ages ago. Of course, I never realized that that

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was in that time only maybe 25 years ago or so. So Holland wasn't a country that was used to battles and war. The idea that there was a actual war going on was...was ludicrous in our eyes. I mean it was...but it took 5 days. After the first morning, it sort of died down. My father almost got shot I remember. He wanted to go out get something to eat near the nearby grocery and there was Dutch soldier. You see, we had a street that had in the middle a canal, and on each side, couple thin streets, and across the canal on the other side was a Dutch soldier standing and Pop opened the front door and shouted to the Dutch soldier...was it alright and go to the grocery store? And the soldier misunderstood him and fired at him. And the bullet hit in the wall right next to him. That would have been the end of my father right there and then. So my father was in a hurry very pale. Five days the war took and, of course, in the course the Germans bombarded Rotterdam and brought the Dutch government to its knees in a hurry. And quiet reigned after that. As a boy I remember going out with a friend as soon as the war was over and going out on the highway, and there were all these German planes that had been shot down...one right next to another...these planes that had dropped parachute troops which were easy targets because these were slow flying planes. One after another. And we thought it was fabulous. It was interesting. All these crashed planes and... I'll give you a cute little sideline. Everyone one of these planes had two engines. And on each engine was a little plaque. Blue and White. It said BMW. And to this day, it's very difficult for me to accept anyone driving a car with those emblems. Of course, there is a lot. They're preferred cars now. Right? But to me, that symbol means war and German invasion. That's strange isn't it. So as a boy and with my friends on bicycles, we thought it was all fabulous. All these crashed planes, and I remember going out to some other planes that were parked. The Dutch had parked some planes under trees. Supposedly, if there would be some battle and these planes had never been touched. They were totally outmoded planes. By the way, my friend and I loved planes. I still do. So my friend and I went in there and got instruments out of these planes you know, and for the first time I had a real instrument out of an airplane. So you realize that, to me, the German invasion was kind of...well, it was a little scary, but it was a lot of fun. There was a lot of excitement. And when the first German rolled into town...the first one that I saw was in a camouflage suit with a...with a typical German helmet on, and on a motorcycle with a sidecar and in the sidecar was another German. And they all had camouflaged suits and...and the

motorcycles were...oops... Maybe you want to make a break here.

Q: Can we stop the tape a minute please. We need to fix this.

A: I've had quite a time with this mike. This is the second time it fell off. Is this alright now?

Q: You're fine.

A: Okay. You tell me when I should resume.

Q: Alright. You're fine. You were looking at all these planes.

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A: And the Germans came in. The first Germans right on the motorcycles. They were kind of curious specimens. They didn't speak Dutch. They sort of roared through town. They seemed harmless. As a boy I had no idea what this really meant. We settled in with the Germans. By now, the Germans would march through town as they [were] singing sometimes or they would walk by the stores. As a matter of fact, there was a German came into my father's store to buy a suit and my father helped him and the guy bought a suit. I think he bought two suits and he bought that. Life seemed normal. We seemed to be able to live with this you know. That's how it all started. Nice days in May. Strange people walking the streets, but rather harmless. It would all be over pretty soon anyway. That was the story. The war would be over soon. It would last maybe a couple of months and then the English would come and the American would come and the Russians...no, the Russians...I guess...they hadn't invaded Russia yet. Well, then, of course, the English got defeated and the English and French got defeated in a hurry in France, and there was Dunkirk and then everything came to sort of a standstill you know, sort of the English were in England and we were in Holland and life would go on until the war was over. And very slowly, very slowly, things began to happen. Little notices in the newspapers about.... Now, I don't exactly know the sequence, of course, but little notices in newspapers such as Jews were not allowed anymore to live right near the coastal areas because they could be traitors. And then some weeks later maybe there would be a notice that said that Jews shouldn't have any radios. So every Jew was supposed to bring his radio to town hall. This went all through the Dutch government you see, so it all didn't seem so terrible. It and the reaction of my parents and I guess most Jews in Holland who hadn't been repressed for 300 years probably was that was a minor thing, you know. They wanted our radios. So the hell with them. We'd bring the radio. If they wanted us not to live in the coastal areas, so we'd move inland a ways. It all seemed rather...how shall I say childish to us....all this nonsense, you know. And the choice always was either you comply or you go to jail. Well, nobody in my family had ever gone to jail. You didn't go to jail. You didn't...the Dutch were very disciplined people. When somebody said don't go through this gate because that is private property, you didn't go through that. You followed the law. And these laws were new laws. So the idea was...I mean you

begin...you begin to feel something was going on there that we didn't like, of course, but it was easier to comply with it than to get thrown in jail. You weren't going to be thrown in jail for having a radio. This is crazy you know. So you brought your radio. But then a little later on...I think it was a matter of copper and brass and all kinds of stuff. And for strange reason we thought that was kind of ridiculous so we took all...I remember taking all our copper and brass pots that we had in the house. It wasn't...my parents weren't very rich so it wasn't much of any consequence and burying it somewhere in a park, where we were sure after the Germans were gone, we'd dig it up and put it back on the shelf. As a matter of fact, after the war I went back and never find the Goddamn stuff back. I never could find a park. It was so changed. Who the hell knows. So there was this slow infiltration of little

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things. And the best thing was to comply with it because the alternative was heavy punishment. None of it seemed worthwhile. Then it was bicycles. Jews shouldn't have bicycles. We should bring all our bicycles. People brought their bicycles. I don't think we did. Now let's see. How did it go on? Then there came a decree. And this is all issued in the Dutch newspapers, mostly through Dutch authorities. It would say that the German command had issued a decree to the Dutch government, and the Dutch government said that Jews were no longer allowed to have businesses. Well, my father had a big business, so they sold all the clothing as fast and made quite a bundle of money because by that time clothing was rationed. They sold the clothing. And rented a house...a large house in Delft in a different location...had many rooms there...had 17 rooms I think, and rented out rooms to students. Delft is a university town. So they set themselves in sort of a business renting rooms to students which was a very common business in Delft because there was so many students and lots of people just lived on renting out rooms to students. So they did that, and they got this big house I remember and lots of rooms in it. And meanwhile, new decrees slowly came out. Jews couldn't have this. Jews couldn't do that. Jews couldn't go to school. I was in school. I was a teenager, and I was in high school. By the way, I was an awful student. Probably one of the worst. My parents were at wits end with me. I was a lousy student. I was a clown. I had a good time everywhere and tried to attract attention by being very funny and was held back several times and finally my father, you know, said, "I don't know what the hell to do with him." He went to to a friend and said what should I with this boy? And he said, "Why don't you let him learn a profession?" So I was sent to, what do you call that,...a trade school, which was kind of shame because there weren't any Jewish kids in trade schools. This was for non-Jewish kids who wanted to become carpenters and electricians and stuff like. Here I was and I was supposed to first become an electrician. And, of course, I horsed around there too and didn't learn. And then I was switched and my father talked with someone and said, "What should my son do? What do you think is a good profession." And this man said, "Do you know what's a good profession? Instruments making, tool maker." And so I started studying for that. And...but as I said one bad day there was a notice in the paper that Jewish children couldn't go to the



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regular schools anymore...could go only to special Jewish schools. Since I lived in a very small town, there were no special Jewish school. All in all maybe in Delft before or during the war...I said before...at the beginning of the German invasion, my guess is maybe that there were maybe 150 maybe 200 Jews in Delft. It's a small town. So we knew most of them by the way. No Jews in school anymore meant that I couldn't go to school anymore. So I was out of trade school. And Pop said to me...he said "Well, you know the best thing is maybe you should learn to play music." Because he was a musician. So I took up the trumpet for a while. And I kinda liked that. I played...started studying the trumpet with a teacher, a very nice man. Everyone felt sorry for me that I couldn't go to school anymore, you know, that kind of stuff. So I studied the trumpet for a while, and I also played the piano. Pop gave me lessons which was horrendous because it's very, very terrible to take lessons from your parents, you know. It didn't work out too well. He taught me piano, and I still play the piano. Badly. Then...oh, and I also had a part-time job as a delivery boy for a for a pharmacy. All these things to keep me busy while my parents got more and more worried about what was going on of course.. I still don't think I grasped exactly what was going on. I just sort of went along with it. Then came a decree one day that you had to wear a star. All Jews had to wear a star if they went out of the house. So my mother sewed on stars on my clothes. And I remember an incident. I have a cousin. My cousin, Hans, who lives in Springfield, Massachusetts now. He's about my age, and at the time we looked a little bit similar. And we had both gotten the same overcoats from my father's former clothing store, so we looked like twins. And Hans always said, "Let's go out and walk like twins." So we put on the same socks, shirt, much as possible...same outfit and we walked as twins. That was wonderful. Except I had a star. He didn't. Well, that was the only thing different. His mom...his mother...my Aunt Clara had married a non-Jew. So Hans was only half Jewish. And I remember walking through Delft and once get stopped by a German. This was the only time a German physically touched me. I was stopped by this German. We were stopped by this German in our same overcoats. And the German said to my cousin, Hans, "What're you do walking with a Jew?" And I said, "He's my cousin." And the German slapped me full in the face and I fell on the ground. Pow. Like this...he said something like "You lousy Jew." And he said to my cousin, "Don't let me ever see you walking with him...with a Jew." It's the only time that I physically was abused by a German. And I'll never forget it. When I think of the concentration camps and what people went through that's my only reference. That incident was

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like...I think it must have woken me up to what was really going on to some extent. Not that I remember it as such now, but that was the only time that I was really physically abused by those bastards, if I can use that expression. Well, he went away. And, of course, my cousin and I still would be together. As a matter of fact during the war, I spent

a short time hidden by my Aunt Clara. Hans and I would go out at night after dark...go to the Catholic churches. I'll get back to that later. It's little bit of ahead. Well, the shipments [i.e. deportations?] begin. Jews were to register, of course. We had all registered I presume at the beginning of the war. I forget that part because some point or another we all supposed to register and we all did. The punishment I guess for not registering was death. So...what the hell? You go to register. What's the big deal. Since in Holland, ostensibly there was no anti-Semitism. I mean you could walk out in the street with a star. Nobody'd say, "Hey, you lousy Jew." It was like a sign of respect. People felt sorry for you. It was kind of nice to have people feel sorry for me. Shipments began, of course. Since I lived in a very small town, it didn't immediately hit us that much. It happened mostly in Amsterdam...big city where there was thousands and thousands of Jews. And you heard this and you read about it and, of course, we got the Jewish newspaper that was published by something called the Joodse Raad, the Jewish Committee in Holland, that sort of tried to regulate...diminish the pain sort of. But in the process actually now as I look back at it helped the Germans, of course. But there again...the goal was to...if somebody had to go and work in Poland as it was held up to us, they would...let's first send healthy people who are not going to suffer too much from the cold there. So they regulated who would go on shipments and so on and who would not. All that for us a little bit far away, but we knew that someday we will have to go and work in Poland. This was...now I want you to understand this very clearly. That not until May 1945, the liberation of Holland, did I have the slightest idea of what was going on with these people who were sent away. We had no idea. I had no idea. I don't know who... Some people must have. As far as we were concerned, you went to Poland to work. And I remember very much very well a member of my family in Amsterdam...I think a cousin of my father's...who stood in the open market in a stall and sold underwear and socks. Saying, her name was Beppie saying, "What's the big deal? We work like dogs here. So we'll go work over there if they want us to do that. This was commonly accepted. And so my father and mother in anticipation of being shipped to Poland, having to go to Poland to work, got nice bundles of backpacks. We got blankets. We got water containers or whatever...socks. You know, socks, warm shoes, whatever...sweaters. It was all neatly in a closet in our house you know. We were ready. All set. We'd be warm.

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We'd have clothing, blankets. We'd go and if we had to Poland, we'd go there. It might be a little colder. Papa and Mom would have to work a little harder, but gee, they were used to work. We were all set. Interesting thing is that my grandfather came over from Amsterdam and he, of course, told horror stories of thousands of Jews being shipped off and the way I remember it. I don't know if I have this from a story by my grandfather or by my father or I was there myself at that particular instant that my father and mother opened this closet and showed my grandfather how well they were prepared. How beautiful. Backpack and how wonderful the blankets, and my grandfather saying, "Do you think you're going to go to Poland to work? And my parents saying, "Yes." "You're not going to go to work. You're going to get killed there. You're gonna die there." Not

that I think he knew that we were being murdered outright but that it was cold and that you'd work yourself to death and that you might die in..you know, like in Siberia, people died in camps. And it's at that point I guess that my parents decided we weren't going to go. Now the penalty for that was death. But by now we came to a state where you had to choose between possibly instant death by being caught and by being set up against and the wall being shot or being shipped to Poland to maybe die of cold and hunger or whatever that was there. Surely no one came back from there. So I guess at some point my parents decided, "We're going to take the chance." And when I think about it now, it's almost impossible to convey what it must have meant for my parents who had never defied a single law in their life in that sense. To defy a law that had the death penalty on it. But they decided. They made a decision. Now this town was very small and there was a gentleman in town, Mr. Kohn, who was sort of the Joodse Raad, the member of the committee in Delft who was to oversee shipment of people from Delft. I guess he was made responsible or whatever. He was a German Jew who had immigrated to Holland. He knew what it was all about I think. And he said, "I'll give you a warning when they come to get you." And I guess as close as I can find out, in October 1942, the warning came. They're coming to get you. My father and mother, two brothers, and I just put on coats and walked out of the house. Shut the door behind us and walked out. And walked to a different part in Delft...outskirts of Delft where we had some friends of the family. Two older people and two daughters, friends of my parents and settled down there for that day and that night. And that's how we left our house. And I guess we didn't back to Delft until maybe June 1945. Interesting enough, my wife, Carla, was hidden in Delft, the town that I that I had left. And you'll get that story too of course. Well, from here on, it becomes my story.

Q: What do you mean?

A: Well, I once...I need dates a little bit for my...these are only monthly dates. They are not exact dates, but I need them for my own reference because it gets kind of confusing. And I'm not so sure that this is even correct. In any case,

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it's my guess that I stayed there about 3 months. The families was called the Nieuwenhuizens. He was an older gentleman who worked as an amanuensis at the university. A very wonderful old man and his wife and they had a young daughter. And I stayed in a little room. That first evening we dispersed. My little brothers went to my grandfather in Amsterdam, and I can't tell you much more about them from there on. But those stories are all with my brothers. My parents went to some friends somewhere else near The Hague. And so that same evening we were all dispersed, and we didn't really get together again until after the war. All of us. I was the only one who stayed at this address...at the Nieuwenhuizens, and I stayed there for about 3 months. And all of a sudden, life was very strange. I had no more parents, of course. I had these very loving people, friends. But this was a strange business. I had nothing to do. I mean I would sit

there in this little room and read a little bit. I fell in love with the girl, of course. What else was there to do? She would have none of it.

Q: Tell us about it.

A: I can't tell you very much. She was gorgeous. There were a couple...they must have been. I don't know how this happened. They must have been like in their 40s maybe. They looked much older. They were like old people to me. They had this gorgeous young daughter. Beautiful, long hair. I can't tell you very much about her. I talked with her. I tried to... See...how old was I? 14. I tried to get her into bed. She wouldn't. I wouldn't know what to do with her probably, but anyway I was very much in love. I was very lonely already right away. I was there from what I could figure out till about January 1942 [43]. I couldn't stay very long. I couldn't stay very long anywhere really. My mother then sort of took over during...when we were all dispersed who started to pretty soon and arranged to find places for the family. And this is the reason why she was later on caught. She was the one...the only one who traveled. She had a false identity card, just like mine. And she traveled and found places. She had contacts here and there I presume with the underground. I'm not quite sure. I really don't know. But the second address I went to were friends of my father when he was a young man. So we're talking about...talking about 1942....we're talking about 19...between 1920 and 1925. He had lived in Utrecht. He'd been a musician. I think he had been in love with one of the sisters. There were three sisters. Now they were all old and middle-aged ladies. And somehow another they talked one of the ladies I think her name was Fie Troost, T-R-O-O-S-t, Troost into taking me. Now remember the...the penalty for taking in Jews was death. That was for sure. So if you took some one in, if you were discovered that's it. You forfeited your life. By this time I was, of course, a fugitive. And I went to this Feetje Troost. I think her name was Fietje Troost, and she lived together with another woman, a younger woman who was a receptionist at a hotel, and I settled in there. I had a beautiful room. I have a picture of that in the pictures that I gave you...the two ladies, and I have a view of the church tower which I made a nice sketch of. My father used to sketch by the way. He was always sort of amateur painter or sketcher and I sort of followed in his steps. I liked the idea. And I started sketching a little bit. So I sketched.

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I had nothing to do. Days went by with me sitting in the room. But there was a piano there. So I got my piano books, songs with piano books, and started practicing the piano a couple hours a day. I stayed with these ladies, and at night I would go out after dark. I would take a small walk around the block. Now in those days it was war time. And everything was dark, blacked out. You know, there was a black out. So it was a little easier to get out of the house and nobody could see you really. The streets were pitch...pitch black. The only thing that you could see in the light was like little flashlight that people had and cars had little slits...you know, the head lights were blocked off, and little slits left open. And so everything was very dark. So it was relatively safe to walk

out, take a walk around the block and get a little fresh air. I also visited some of Fie's sisters....Fietje's sisters...this lady's sisters who lived about 15 minutes walk away in another part of Utrecht. Is it okay that I go into so much detail? Bizarre things happened sometimes during the war. Here I was a fugitive kid. I was 16 years old at that time. And I would walk over in the dark towards that other home to this lady's sister. That lady's sister had a daughter. She was a illegitimate child conceived by a German years and years ago before the war. These lady's...since there was the mother, the sister of Fee and the daughter who was...about 20 is my guess, had always been kind of pro-German because the mother had conceived this child by a German. And the child was half German in a sense. The child would be kind of attracted to German soldiers to go out. Not the common street soldier I think, but officers. I was with these strange people. In addition, in this house they rented a room to a German officer. He was not a member of the army. He was a member of the railroad corps or something like that. The Germans liked uniforms so everybody had lots of uniforms. My father always said, "There's nothing a German likes more than uniforms." This guy had a elaborate uniform, and actually all he was a clerk I presume or a little higher level clerk in the railroad stations. Of course, all the railroads had been taken over by the Germans because this was vital to the war. I'll tell you something bizarre which I'm ashamed at this point. But it's some clowning around in that basement where these ladies lived which by the way was a basement apartment...part of the house was a basement apartment. I would I once donned the whole uniform of this officer, strutted around in his boots with his cap on and his black...sort of blackish dark blue and everybody applauded. They thought it was wonderful the way I looked. I can't imagine

01:50:

doing this now. But I did. They were very lovely. The dangers seems enormous at this point while I'm retelling it. To go to these people...their heart was in the right place. They would have never said that they had a Jew visiting, because I was a son of an artist, Nardus, their childhood friend. Anyway, I stayed with these ladies for ...I have here from January 43 to July 43. That's my guess. I'm not quite sure. Seems...everything seems much longer. But when I tried to schedule this out until the end of the war, I got in the end compressed. It was shorter than I thought. From there I'm not quite sure where we went, but I think what happened was that my parents...I should back track for a second. My parents wound up in the middle of Holland in a place called Soest. They wound up for the better part of the war with a couple. He was an ex-Marine. She was a ex-cleaning lady. And these people had taken my parents in a room. So they were always in there. This is where my mother knitted. My father did sketching and went crazy sometimes because no matter how good the relations were, eventually some friction would ensue with all these people, four people in a tight space, a little house. Irritations set in. My parents decided that it would be wonderful if they could find a little summer place for just a week to escape and just go like ordinary non-Jewish people. Stay a week somewhere in a little hotel. By the way, my father and I had dyed our hair. It was supposed to come out blonde. We dyed it with peroxide I remember except that I don't

know how Pop came out. I came out red. For the rest of the war, I had to keep this up by the way because in Holland anybody who was not blonde and Dutch I mean you know, Jews you could almost pick them out from a crowd in Holland. There were no Italians. There weren't any Spanish-speaking people. The only sort of little bit outlandish looking...well, the darker looking people were Jews. Not outlandish...darker looking. So, anyway we dyed our hair and...and Pop and my mother decided they'd go and rent. They rented a room in a little hotel in a very tiny hamlet called Lage Vuursche. Lage Vuursche was to play quite a role in my life, I guess. Lage Vuursche was a little hotel and a gas station I think and five houses and that was it. It was very lovely. It was like a little hamlet in the middle of the woods. And Papa went and rented this room for a week and moved in. On sort of sideline this because it's important what my father and mother did at that point, they, as Pop told me later on, he said we weren't in that room for more than 15 minutes and there was a knock at the door, and there was a policeman there. And he said, "I want to talk with you people." And Papa and Mother knew that was the end. That's it.

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They were caught. However, the man closed the door behind him and sat down and said, "I want to tell you something." He said, "I'm a policeman in this village." He said, "And I can readily see that you are Jews." He said, "I want to tell you where you should walk and where you should not walk." He said, "I'll protect you." He said, "If anything goes wrong, I'll tell you." This is the man I showed you a picture of, a man sitting with his wife and a child. This is the policeman. I do not know his name anymore. He was an angel to all of us. From what I remember, I joined my father and mother...not in that hotel room, but in a little house called Ons Huis(?) which was a sort of...I didn't know there were people like that then already, but they were people who were nature preservists. They had this...some did a little hiking, a little walking, and somehow or other my parents spent some time in that house and I went there too and we joined and I was for a little I don't know, maybe a week, but I can remember together with my parents in that place. Now, I had to go somewhere else.

Q: At that point, let's hold it. They're going to change tapes.

End of Tape #1

**Tape #2**

A: Great idea. I would like to go to the bathroom.

Q: Okay. We can get started again. Let's pick up where we left off.

A: Okay. We're now at July 1943 and after having spent maybe a week with my parents at this this nature lover's retreat...someone found a new place for me. Now, I don't know who. It's the first time that I went to work on a farm. Now, you gotta realize I was a teenager from the city. I'd really never done any heavy physical work in my life. I was rather spoiled I think. My father and my mother I remember accompanying me not very far from this place in Lage Vuursche, this little hamlet, to a road that led into farm land, grassy farm land, along a canal and you went a couple of miles and you wound up at this tiny little farmhouse. Far away from really everything. That's how I remember it anyway. And a Dutch farm in that part of the country was very small and was all dairy and a few cows, and that's about all the farm I had. I don't remember him having a wife. I have a feeling that he had. Now this is the first that I was placed in a place where the farmer didn't know I was Jewish. I was now from then on...I was a Christian kid from the city where in the meantime food became less, you know. I mean it's harder to get and everything was rationed since the Germans stole every damn thing away. And this was sort of like a pose I presume as a kid from the city who needed fattening up and he would work for his keep. So here I was, of course, with my red hair and dropped off at this farm. And the first thing I had to do was wear wooden shoes. Because that part of Holland is all I would say practically below water level I guess. It was all green land, all meadows with..with every hundred yards or so little canals to...to drain off the water. So wherever you went it was wet. First thing, I had to get pair of wooden shoes because that is the ideal wear in places like that so. I remember I'm mentioning this because wooden shoes, if you're not used to them, they're hell on your feet. They will chafe open the upper part of your feet and your heels and this is what I did. For about a week, I'd walk around with this blood in my...in these wooden shoes. It's really okay for people who are used to it, but I got used to it. You grow callouses very fast. I had to get up at 4 o'clock in the morning and milk cows. I had to learn how to milk cows, then carry the, you know, 40 gallon cans to a little boat. Put them in a little row boat, then row them down to the end of the canal where I presume a cart would pick them up. Other parts were cleaning out stables spreading manure, mowing grassland, feeding the animals, and

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helping by the birth of one. I remember pulling out a calf with ropes. For me it was hell. It was utter hell. I mean I was only 16 or 17 years old. I had no parents. I was in constant danger of my life. By then I knew what was going on. One wrong word, one wrong move, one wrong clue and I would have had it. Farmer would have said when(??) and he would have maybe denounced me. Right? Would have maybe collected some reward for delivering a Jew to the Nazis. So, it's in that time my mother said and she swore that I

have said this several times. I don't remember anything of it. My mother swore that during...especially during that time I wanted to give myself up. I didn't want to hide anymore. I remember nothing of this. But my mother has...kept good records in her head usually so I believe and she wouldn't make this up. She said, "You were so desperate that you wanted to give yourself up and I kept saying to you...we kept saying to you, "It will pass. It will pass." My mother had a little sign. It said, "This also will pass." So things were pretty grim then. I was a very lonely kid. I learned to work, but it wasn't easy. The farmer was very unhappy. I was not much help in the beginning. I couldn't lift 40-gallon cans. You know...you gotta know how to do it. I could barely walk in those God damn shoes. I wasn't there very long. From what I could find out, I must have been there from July 43 until September 43. In looking at the map, the farm must have been in place called Tienhoven (?). It's the closest I can find out. I don't remember the man's name. I remember that we ate badly. He was very poor. It was a poor little farm. Where did I go from there? Let me see. Yeah, it seems to me that from September 43 for about a month, I went to my Aunt Clara in The Hague where my cousin Hans lived. I have two more cousins, Hans, Fritz, and Tony. They all lived in The Hague in a small house. And I stayed with my Aunt Clara and I stayed with my Aunt Clara's in-laws, older people. And I think it can't have been for very long. It can't have been mostly a couple of weeks or a month. And...yes...I remember being at my cousin Hans's grandfather and grandmother, my Aunt Clara's in-laws in The Hague. They only lived a couple of streets apart, so I could walk from the one to the other. And I was with these older people and they were very...very sweet. But they only would take me for a week. That was my.... They were scared. It was all scary. During that week, their son came to visit...my Aunt Clara's former husband. They had been divorced. And I can remember he came unexpectedly and I threw myself under the couch. And I was lying there and I saw these footsteps going...his shoes going by. But that whole period in The Hague, that couple of weeks or whatever it was was very wonderful. It was with my family and my aunt. It was with my cousin. My cousin, Hans, and I would go out in the evening for a walk. In the daytime, of course, I was always indoors. In the evening we'd go and at night we'd go out and we would go to the Catholic Church and we'd sit in the back of the Catholic Church. I had never been in my life in a Catholic Church. So here was all this ceremony going on. And it was wonderful. I thought that. They would come by with these censers and they...and the hats and all the...I thought I'd seen the Pope every time. I said...I came back to my Aunt Clara, "I saw the Pope." And she laughed. This was our entertainment. We'd go to the church and sit in the back in a pew and watch the processions going. It it was a wonderful time, but we couldn't stay there. Everybody was dead scared, you know. My Aunt who was Jewish herself, of course. Her children...the only thing that saved her I guess was her children were half Jewish. So I had to leave. Now from my recollection what happened was that from there in October 1943, I went back with the help of this policeman to the Lage Vuursche, but not to that little hotel where my parents had stayed for a week. The policeman had helped to I say build a camp, a underground resistance camp, in one of the woods nearby. It was right next to a Catholic, what do you call a place where nuns?



Q: Convent.

A: Convent. Right next to a convent. There was the fence of the convent and then there was...in Holland, you don't really have large forests. And in Lage Vuursche at that time, they were like rectangles of forests. Not very high trees...trees maybe 50, 60 feet maybe at most or something you know. all planted...these were planted forests. In the middle of that, the resistance...members of the resistance had dug out a camp. It was half underground and then covered with timbers and on the timbers sod and on top of the sod, grass and trees and plants. So that if you would stand right next to it, you wouldn't know it was there. The entrance to it...well, there was one entrance. It was sort of dug out was hidden by little pine trees that were cut from some other forests and put there so that...and footsteps were erased, so that you could stand almost in front of this place and you wouldn't know there was anything there. The entrance to this underground resistance camp was by a very circuitous road. It started if...if you can visualize a rectangle...it started in one end and you sort of...it's a little bit like one of these puzzles...how to get out of the maze. It would swirl around and swirl around and then finally wind up in the center at this camp. This was in order...also to not have a straight path and not see footsteps and all that. It was very cleverly done. Food was and I must mention this wonderful... Food was delivered to us by the nuns of the convent. Food was delivered to us on their side of the fence and we would lift it over the fence. It was a high fence...about a 6 or 8 foot high fence. We would...either we had cut an opening. Warm food in the evening. Yes. It was wonderful. Nobody knew at first. The nuns didn't know anything. The convent was a convent. The only one who kept all the contact was the policeman. He had to come back between the nuns and the Nazis. Now this man posed as a Nazi you see. This man had intimate contact with the Germans, who thought he was real hero. You see, there was a Dutch Nazi party called the NSB, The National Socialist Bond and he was a member of that. He posed very cleverly as a Nazi and played a dual role. His real heart was with us, I must say. I was in that camp I do not know how long. I tried to find out. It seemed to be me I can't have been there any longer than 1 to 3 months really. It seemed like a long time. In that camp I was a non-active member because I was very young first of all. Most of the members were grown up men. And the only thing that I actively did there was when they would bring in English or American flying personnel that had been shot down somewhere in Holland some of those they would convey to our underground hideout and I remember I spoke English for some reason. Now I had lived, of course, for 3 years in the States when I was a little kid, like I told you but I spoke enough English for some...I can't recall how. I learned some English in high school. I forgot. Yeah. I learned some English in high school and I guess probably what was still resided in the back of my head. I was designated to find out if these guys were for real because the Nazi would sometimes pose fake flyers and and that discover members of the underground. So I was designated to sit with these men and interview them. You know, just like you're interviewing me now, but in a very casual manner and find out if they were real or not. And I remember sitting up a whole night with a English navigator and a Canadian gunner to find out and they were real alright. Because the Canadian gunner told me about he would hunt bears. And their river — somewhere in the north near the polar

circle and he talked very real. And the English was differently, told about his family and his home somewhere in England. So that's what I did. And the rest I don't know what I did. I guess I learned to play chess. We listened to classical music. We had...the members were all over the place as far as denomination or whatever...religions. There was one communists. There was one very Christian man. There was a shoemaker. There was a bookkeeper. And there were people who would come in and out. Women, messengers nearby in the woods were covered caches of guns and ammunition and all that. They would go out on night raids and raid town halls and city halls for stamps such as you can see on my false

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identity card. So we had there a whole like place where they would also steal identify cards and they would falsify them. So this was sort of like a center like that. Sometime my guess it was December...sometime during December 1943, our policeman...our friendly policeman gave the warning that he had heard rumors about a raid and it was decided by the members of the camp that we would post guards on the periphery near where the road was...in shifts. And it happened that a young man...shoemaker...and I got the shift from midnight until or maybe from 4 AM to 8...8 AM. I think we had four hour shifts. Everybody else was in bed in the camp. It was very quiet. It was very quiet in the morning. It was overcast. It was dark. It was 4 o'clock in the morning, 5. We heard noise. We heard like trucks coming up the road, and these little slits of lights and then we saw them come driving up the road. Now we thought maybe they'd pass by. Maybe it was just a German convoy going someplace else. But they stopped like 200 yards away from us. And they started to dismount. There were hundreds. They dismounted, they had dogs. They had machine guns. They lined up in hundreds. Their information was sketchy I presume. They didn't know what they were going to find. They knew there was a resistance camp there. They thought...maybe have thought find a couple hundred resistance men with...with guns. They came with searchlights. It was a big, big operation. As soon as we realized this was it, we ran back to this path...this crazy path...ran into the...into the camp, shouted at the top of our lungs, "The Germans...the Germans. They're coming. They're here. They're here." Well, it was pandemonium. You know, these guys trying to jump out of their beds in pajamas and without pajamas trying to get into clothes. We didn't stop. As soon as we realized that everybody had been, you know, knew what it was, we fled out. And just as we were fled out of this rectangle of woods, we saw the Germans coming from around the corner on that side and around the corner on this side, circling. So he and I...this young man who I don't know his name anymore, just ran into the next wood and into the next wood and into the next wood, and we ran and ran and ran. We must have run for, I don't know, maybe three quarters of an hour till we were far, far away from that place. We had made an agreement though...the members of this resistance camp...they were very well organized. They said if ever there's a raid we will meet again after it's over at a certain, particular place about 2 miles from the camp. This was the way it was organized. So we ran and ran and ran and we really didn't know where the hell to go and I said, "You know what? My father is taking painting lessons

somewhere." Pop you see we had a strange kind of hiding life. Papa and my mother were hiding in this room, but once a week Pop would get out on his bicycle I think and peddle to this nearby town where there was a painter who gave him lessons. I'm not sure this...this painter knew he was Jewish. I think he probably did. I know my brothers and I have paintings hanging on his mantle. So I have a painting by Mr. Schluter of all many other German names. Mr. Schluter. It's a very good painting...Dutch painting. So I knew Pop was there. How I don't know. I guess it was like a Wednesday or whatever. So I said, "Let's go there." What I didn't realize at that point that I been so shocked. I'm sitting here, I'm still shocked now. At that point I didn't realize. I was like just a boy running. I thought, "Well, we ran and we made it." Somehow or another I found this painter. This boy and I we came there. This young man and I, we came there and there was my father sitting and painting and very quiet. And I said, "Pop, I got to talk with you." He said, "Yes." I said, "Something terrible is happening." He said, "What happened?" I said, "The Germans came for us." "Oh," he said. "Well," he said, "You're here now." Pop never understood things too well. "Well, you're here now. Relax." I said, "Yes, but all these men are there and they're all surrounded." He said, "Oh. What do you want to do?" I said, "I don't know what to do." Christ, I was only...what was I...16, 17 years old boy. I didn't know what the hell to do in this situation. Nobody did ever tell if they later come with...as later on found half a division of men with search lights and dogs and machine guns and anti-aircraft...anti...I mean anti-tank guns and anti-aircraft stuff. I mean...not to shoot down planes, but kind of, you know guns to...heavier stuff. They didn't know what they would find. I said, "Pop, we suppose to meet later on again after dark." "Oh," he said, "Well, okay. Then stay here for a time and then you'll meet them after dark." So we stayed there from all I can remember. Well, I was...you know, I was in shock. Pop didn't know it. Nobody else knew it. I didn't know it. It got dark. Pop in the meantime, I guess, had gone back to his...peddled back to my mother's and gone into his room again and he must have told my mother what was going on. My mother was much sharper, you see. Always was. It got dark, and this young man and I wandered back into what we didn't realize was a huge net which had been set up by the Germans...wondered back into this huge circle and waited at this spot. Nobody showed up. Except one person. My mother. She said to the young man and to me...she said, "We will just act like we are lovers. We will just be a threesome and we'll laugh and we'll act." I said, "What about my gun?" I had a 9 millimeter Mauser pistol with me and so did he. We were armed. My mother took the guns and she buried them somewhere under a tree and we got to a point where there was a German guard. Then we laughed it up and we kissed and we hugged and he laughed and he let us through. And I spent that first night...the boy I don't know where he went, but he went off some place else. I went with my parents to their hiding place, and spent a night...restless, every home there...their place was right on the highway. Every time a truck came back I was like this. For years afterwards, every time a truck went by. I stayed only one night there because they didn't dare to have me in addition, of course, and I went into a...I was I think again helped by this policeman. I went for a short while in Hilversum. It's a nearby town to a home of a notary public and his sister. Lovely people. Lived in a mansion from what I remember. It's probably larger...rather a large house. They gave me a room with maid service. Yeah. Gave me a room with maid

service, and it was just what I needed because there's a little picture in the group of small pictures of hiding places that looks out on the garden. That was my view. And there was a bookcase. I was growing up fast. By then, I wasn't anymore a boy I think. It's an interesting thing what happened to me there in that I came from a family that was terribly non-religious. Matter of fact, my father hated anything that smacked of religion. He always felt that priests and ministers and rabbis were all the same breed and organized religion was hell, and he didn't want to have anything to do with it. I never was religious either. I didn't know anything about being Jewish very much. I was in that room and there was a Bible in the bookcase. It was a Bible for reading. A nice big edition. I'd never read a word in the Bible in my life. I thought it would be interesting to...as I said, I said I was growing up fast. I thought maybe I should read something, and something philosophical. I grabbed the Bible. I opened it. I opened it onto one of the prophets. I think Jeremiah. And what I read was, 'and you shall try to sell yourself and nobody will want to buy you, and you shall try to hide and nobody...nobody will take you.' And on and on and on it went. And I said, "Gees, this is my story. This is me." You know. I got instant religion, I got instant...it was not instant. I read through the whole Old Testament. It was a revelation to me. Something to hold on to. All of a sudden, here was my people. This is my history. And I pledged...I pledged to God if he would save all my family, I would be religious to the end of my life. I'm ashamed to say I didn't keep the promise. I tried to keep it for some years after the war, but it slowly leaked away, especially after I found out that God had let 6 million others perish. Anyway, I got instant religion. And I got a Bible. I got a Bible. I think I got it for free from the Bible Society. And I carried that Bible with me from there on wherever I went. I went from that house...I went back to farming. But in better farms. I went from December...We're now at December 43 and I must have been there a few weeks in this house, maybe a month and I recuperated to a great extent. At least the jitters left me. I had been very close to death I realized. And I went out to a farm. I don't know if the policeman again helped me there with the first farm. It may well have been because I have the feeling these people knew I was Jewish. This was an entirely different kind of farm. This was in the eastern part of Holland more...this was a rotund farm with rotund wife and three rotund daughters. Big apple cheeks, just like you expect farmers to look. And they were jolly people, and they were friendly and they ate well. And by this time, I also knew how to work better. You know, I again cleaned stables. I milked cows. I got very good at milking. I could milk 14 head of cow in the morning. You know, I went from that farm to another farm and there I got the shock of my life one morning. And everywhere I went I read the Bible, which worked excellently because these people didn't know I was Jewish, and they thought I was a very Christian boy. Little did they know I only read the Old Testament. Whatever... I slept like Dutch farm hands do in a little room with a straw...bag with straw...straw in it, a straw mattress. And right in with the animals portion of the house. I was used to it. One morning I woke up I heard German voices. I thought this is it. Again, this is it. German voices. However...I mean it was like dying. I tell this now you know.... Well, let me finish this first. It was like dying. All they came to do is steal a couple of head of cattle. They had a truck, and they carried them off you know. I thought it was it. This is it. This is me. You know, as I am telling you it seemed to me that I was in good shape. However,

I have been for...the last 22 years in psychotherapy and I tell this story very often over and over again to my psychiatrist. That on those farms I trained myself to such an extent to forget things that if I would walk from here to the door if you had asked me at the door where did you come from, I wouldn't know. If you ask me where did you go, I would say to the door. But beyond that, I don't know. I lived in like a tiny segment of time. I presume that the past and the possible future were too awful to contemplate so that... It was a strange thing. Anyway,

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I worked on these farms and I worked very well. The last farm I worked got to be winter from all I could find. Well, now it...from December 1943 to what I figure is August 44, I worked on farms as a farm hand. I would actually go to the towns where I worked and register at the town hall with my false identify card, which is quite dangerous. If I would have run into someone who would have recognized what the signs of a false identify card was, I would have been caught. However, they would register me. These were Dutch clerks, you know. My brothers were somewhere...I don't know. On one of the farms my...one of my brothers...my brother, At, came over for a week and stayed with me. He was billed as Ed's brother who came from the city who also needed some fattening up. Actually, he came from some hiding place that I don't know. My brother could tell you. My parents were still in their own...in their little place. But my mother had a plan. She did a lot of traveling around taking care of places for my brother. My brother, Fred, almost died here. I don't know...he had pneumonia, and nobody took care of him. She found him with high fever somewhere, got him to a hospital. You see, my mother did all kinds of things. She traveled. My mother had a plan. She had a plan for summer of 1944. She would rent a little cottage, and she would spend it together with my father there as people from the city who came to rent a little place for the summer. Like you would do any place. And my two brothers would come there too at times, and would be like having her children around her for a little bit my mother said. And as she traveled toward my brother...let me not lose track of the time, we're now talking spring of 1944, May 1944. I was working on farms. My brothers were in the south of Holland, spread around. My parents were still in Soest with those two people. My brother traveled toward my brother or came back from my brother in the south, again arranging another home which was...my brother, At, was a very difficult child. He was a very nervous child. It was difficult. He would wet his bed. And people wouldn't have anymore. And it was all very difficult. I think those boys also went as Christian boys by the way, not just Jewish kids. They had to pray. They learned to pray and, you know, all this stuff. My mother on her way back in May 44...I think it was in Utrecht, somewhere in a railroad station ran into a Gestapo character, green police member who could recognize falsified identify cards, nabbed her and sent her to a Dutch concentration camp, in Westerbork. From there, she was shipped to Bergen-Belsen in the fall of 44. I was at the farm. Pop decided that the little house had been rented already by my mother. He might as well go there. He went. My two little brothers were delivered there by an aunt of mine. My father had two brothers. I'm not quite clear. At some point, we visited them because they were now not

very far from where I was working on the farm, about an hour bicycling. So I visited them, and decided Pop needs help with these two boys. By this time I was a man. I had been

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working on farms. I'd been laughing at jokes about Jews at the breakfast table with farmers. I had learned my lesson. And I decided Pop needed help. So I gave up my job at the farm, bicycled and joined my father and my two brothers. I guess this is around August 44. And that's how four of us spent the ending of the war. Minus my mother, of course, who we knew now had been shipped to Bergen-Belsen. We still didn't know that they were destroying Jews. We still didn't know what was going on. We knew there was a concentration camp. We didn't know they were killing people. May 44, my mother was caught. We spent the winter of 44 in this tiny little cottage of which you have a drawing of mine. We installed a stove when it got to be winter. The owner of the cottage lived right next door in a beautiful home didn't know we were Jewish. He thought we were family from the city who didn't have enough to eat anymore. By this time things were getting very desperate in Holland. And he was no friend of ours because, as Pop told me, one of the first days that he was in this cottage this gentleman said to him, "Mr. Lessing, would you like to take a walk and I'll show you the property. I have many fruit trees and so on." And Pop said, "Sure. Sure." And acted very civilized and took a walk around and as they were walking, the gentleman meandered in talking about the war situation which could hardly help because it had been going on then for about 4, 5 years and he said, "It's a terrible situation with the war." My father said, "No doubt. No doubt." And he said, "Those Germans," he said, "they are terrible." "No doubt," said my father, "no doubt." "They are almost as bad as the Jews." "No doubt," said my father, "no doubt. You said it." We then proceeded to steal every Goddamn thing we could find on his property and sell it to the farmers in the area to get bread so I mean I felt so sorry about this. This man had interesting then...a natural fruit, no artificial fertilizers, nothing...no sprays...natural fruit farm. He had thousands of of these what you call these...these glass jars in which you preserve...preserve fruits in. Farmers wanted those very much. We sold them by the hundreds and survived the war there. It's a long story that. I don't know how much time I still have to tell you, but to tell you stories about that little house.

Q: Tell us some.

A: Some. Alright. I'll tell you some of the interesting highlights. Since there was no kitchen in this little cottage, we put a stove in. Anything was on a very heavy protest of the gentleman next door. But we said, "Well, we don't want to go back to the city." We put in a stove. We needed fuel. Every night my father and I would go out to a nearby woods where they had high pine trees and with our little saw we would cut apart one of the pine trees and then cut off the branches and spread them around so it wasn't too... We'd go into the forest so you wouldn't see them. Yeah. We'd carry this tree on our shoulders. We had shoulder pads specially made, carried it home, and we cut it up into portions and the next

day we would split it and we would cook. We didn't have salt, so my father found that the farmers had on the corners of their meadows, bit blocks of salt for the cows to lick on. They called it cow licks I think. And we'd steal those, and we'd break those in pieces and hammer them down and then boil them in water and then out of that sediment, we'd boil away and out of that we'd have salt. We got the news from the nearby homes where there many people hidden. And so every night we go and listen to radio Orange so we got the news from there. One morning I woke up. There was something draped over the window of the cottage. A huge orange parachute. We're talking now about probably November 44. I went out the little house and looked around and the ground was covered with parachutes and containers with...as I opened one...guns. I thought, "This is trouble. This is trouble for us." Radios. Shoes. Uniforms. Everything dropped for the resistance. Miss dropped. Dropped in the wrong place. Soon the Germans showed up. I was still...I presume...too...too adventurous. I stole a parachute. I figured we could make blouses out of it or something. You know, everything was pretty desperate. Clothing, everything. I took a parachute. The goddamn Germans counted the containers and the parachutes and came to our little house and said, "We're missing a parachute. If it isn't back here within a half hour, we shoot the four of you. I just brought the parachute back. They left. They were really Wehrmacht. They were really army. They were...come to persecute Jews. However, I still had hidden a container with a friend of mine under a... There's a container had fallen under a tree trunk. That tree had fallen over in a storm. They never found it. So we had some English cigarettes and we had chocolates. We had a couple of things for a little while. The winter of 44 was very harsh. We ran out of everything. We went begging for food. My brothers we went begging for sandwiches, which was sometimes funny too but I won't go into detail unless I still have time. But we went begging for sandwiches and we went begging for grain and then we would out of the grain make boiled bread and so on and we were far better off than some of the people in the west of Holland. At least we could get our hands on some foods. And we stayed there in the very harsh winter. My father and I made a trip by bicycle to some of the farms where I had worked. And we got a couple of eggs and a quart of milk and carried it all back. And so my brothers worked too...went out begging for grain when they were thrashing..when there was a thrashing machine nearby. And so the winter went. And we burned up trees and the forest got pretty thin, and then came the spring. And it came a tremendous noise and firing and guns and we said, "This is it." It was Arnhem. No, sorry. Got it mixed up. That was in the fall, 44. Tremendous firing of guns and we said, "This is it. Freedom! They're coming." And it was Arnhem. And they got defeated as you probably know, and everything stopped for the winter. But then in the spring, in April, the end of April...I think the beginning of May...May was always an important month for us. Everything happened in May. My birthday. The Germans. My mother got caught. We just found out that my mother is still alive, again in May. Then in May, noise came. Firing started. Grenades started flying over. Explosions. It was war. And we were in the center of it. So we had a dugout where we could hide. And I don't know if there's enough time? Is there still enough time for a little story?

Q: Yes.

A: Because this is a cute story. I don't want to miss it. Not everything is so heavy. This is a cute story. The farmers around us...we lived...the little cottage was actually in the middle of farm country. There were little farms around. The farmers never gave us anything. We would ask them for some bread. Naw, we ain't got bread. We had to go a little further away and beg. As the firing came nearer and nearer, branches started falling off the trees, bullets whizzing around. Just like you see in a wild west movie. One of the farmers came over and said, "You want a duck?" My father

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said, "A duck? A real duck?" "Yeah," you want a duck?" "Yeah," said my father, "I want a duck. Sure." He said, "Okay, here's a duck." We got this duck which was riddled with shrapnel. It had been hit by a grenade or something. Anyway, we took the pieces of steel out and we put it in the fire and started frying the duck. The fighting got so heavy though that my Pop sent the boys...my brothers into the dugout with that gentleman with his family. And we didn't want to leave the duck. I mean a duck, we hadn't eaten any meat for God knows how long. So the duck was doing okay, but the fire was getting lower so, the stuff was breezing right around our... So finally the duck was done, and we crawled on our bellies, Pop holding the pot with the duck toward the dugout. And we were in this underground dugout for two days and two nights. This shell fire was hell. It was awful. I mean it...it just holes like, you know, the size of a good size room were dug right around us. And it stopped. We heard voices. Oh, my God, this is it. Freedom. German voices. Two German soldiers with machine guns going right over our dugout. It's the last Germans I saw. The last Germans in uniform I saw. I don't know where they went. Firing started up again. It lasted for awhile. Silence again. I said to Pop, "Let's go out and see what's happening." Pop and I walked out of the dugout. We got in front and I can't demonstrate this here. We stood up and we both went \_\_\_\_ right to our knees on the floor. The nerve shattering...I mean the firing of these...these projectiles whizzing around you howling and exploding. I could just imagine what soldiers go through in the field. It had shaken us so much we couldn't we couldn't stand up for a while. But to make a long story short, that was it. Soon tanks were rattling by with big white stars on it. And we stood at the side of the road and we waved and these guys said, "Hi." I said, "Why aren't they happy?" I mean this...we cried. We stood there crying at these...at these trucks went by and we couldn't believe. Of course, we thought maybe they're Germans. There not happy. Now these guys were in the army. So it was not a bad day. Some more resistance of the Germans, but the village was liberated...the nearby village...of 4,000. And Pop almost got killed the last minute. Pop almost got killed during.. when the firing stopped, he said, "We should be able to get some food." Now there was a communal kitchen in the village where we would go every day and get a pail with some slop. And he said, "We should go there." I said, "Pop, I don't think...you know, it's just after the battle." He said, "I should go there. We have to eat something." So he went and came back very pale. He said he had gone to the



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edge of the village with two guys with machine guns post in the street and he had to rattle his way on the bicycle. In those days there were no more tires that had air in them. So we made tires out of old car tires. We cut strips of old car tires. But, of course, this was solid. It was like driving on wood you know. I mean it was like the bicycle rattled and made a horrendous noise, so these two Canadian soldiers must have heard him coming from a mile. But they were on their alert, and he rattled right in front of them and he pointed the machine gun on him and said, "Who the hell are you?" He said, "I'm going for some food." He said, "Get the fuck off the street." And he passed by and he came back home. And that was the second time in the war. At the beginning and the end he almost got killed. So after that, we got liberated. I will tell you one small, funny incident. We had nothing to eat very much. So Pop decided...I had found some...my brothers and I found some German objects...a helmet and instruction book to go with a gun, a couple of crazy things. Pop said, "You know what? Maybe we could trade with Canadians. These are souvenirs." So we went to the Canadian camp. By now we were surrounded by Canadians, all settled down in tents. And a whole division settled down. Pop was simply amazing. He went there and he said, "You want a German helmet." The guy said, "Yeah." He says, "Well, we'd like to have some coffee." "Well," he said, "here's a pot of coffee." "We got this nice instruction book." "Oh. Well, we'll give you five cans of...of spam for that." And so we traded. And we got to the village, and there was a detachment of military police. Big, strapping guys, with red mustaches, and big helmets and MP on it you know, and on Harley Davidson's and Pop said "Can I trade anything for sugar. We have no sugar." This guy said, "Well, he said, "We haven't got sugar right now. If you come back tomorrow morning, he said, we'll give you some " And he went back the next morning and they were just packing up. And he said...my father said, "Hey, you told me I could get some sugar." You know, they were revving up these big Harley Davidsons' you know, and they're going to move the whole division. You know, these guys...these guys division so. He said, "By the way...big mustache, red haired guy, huge, said, "You a Jew?" Pop instinctively said, "No, of course, I'm not a Jew. We had come through years of hiding. He said, "That's too bad. I only give food to Jews because I'm Jewish myself. Bye." And zoomed off. So this was this was the fortune. Well, to wind it up, we found transportation back on a truck. Got back to Delft. And in Delft, Pop went to town hall and said, "I used to have a house here. 17 rooms." And they said, "Thank God, somebody came back." "What do you want?" he said. "You want a house?" "Yeah, we need a house." "So, we'll give you a house. Let's take you around" He said, "Now this house was from this Nazi and this house from this Nazi." And they gave us a house, and then they said, "What do you do for living." Pop said, "I'm a music teacher." "So, what do you teach?" "I teach cello and piano." He says, "I'll give you a piano. Here's 15 pianos." They had taken everything from the Nazi. We got everything. A whole house set up. Now, I'll back track for a second to May the liberation. We're liberated. What happened to my mother? One of the first weeks that we were liberated...there was no transportation, of course. There was no trains, no...the only thing that was going was the Canadian army, all around. Pop got on his old bicycle and went to Barneveld a nearby town to find... He

had heard there was a Red Cross station there that gave information about people, missing people. And he went there and I understand as Pop said it the exact day that my mother was called, they found her on the list in Philipville, Algeria in a UNRRA, United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration camp. Well, that story's my mother's really, but she told me later or she told us later that she was in this camp in Bergen-Belsen and she was very sick and she tried...sick at heart and... She didn't have typhoid. People were dying left and right around her. She had maintained she was an American citizen. The minute she was caught...says, "I'm a American citizen and you have no right to arrest me and me." They interviewed her at length. Since we had lived for 3 years in the States, she knew how to describe streets, stores. It was all God knows 25 years old or something, but they seemed to believe her. My mother sometimes was like a little psychic it seems. She could predict people coming to visit. She said, "I had a dream in which somebody held up a newspaper, and on the newspaper it said January 15th, and I woke up and I thought I had to remember that date. That's important. On January 15th, she was put on...on a transport and exchanged for German prisoners with another bunch of Dutch Jews, went to Switzerland where many of them still died, and from Switzerland I guess to Portugal and Portugal to \_\_\_\_\_ whatever, and wound up in Algeria. And some months after we had been settled in this Nazi house, former Nazi house, a truck...it was...it was dusk. You couldn't see too well anymore, and trucks stopped...an army truck stopped in front of the house which, by then, wasn't anything very...very extraordinary because they were English and American and Canadian army trucks all around and my brothers had been made mascots of the Israel soldiers. And the truck stopped and a woman in a jumpsuit, very tanned, looked at me and said, "Oh, could you tell me where the Lessings live." I said, "Mama." I said, "Mother, it's you?" She said, "Yes." We were all back together. We were all back together again for a little while because pretty soon, of course, I guess maybe a year later or so, Pop and I went to the States. We had reapplied for a visa. Mother stayed behind with my two brothers and came over a year later. But I had...in the meantime, I'd joined the Zionist organization. Thanks to the the Jewish Brigade which was a brigade within the 8th English army. These soldiers came over with a patch with a Star of David on it. These men did everything to rehabilitate us. They settled...first we had Canadians. Then we had some English soldiers taking care of a bunch of German prisoners of war who were in a nearby camp. Then the Jewish soldiers came. And my two brothers, my two little brothers said, "There's Jewish soldiers. They're Jewish soldiers. They have the Star of David on their arm." And we said, "There's no such thing." "Yes. Yes." We found out. It was the Jewish Brigade. But my brothers went to this camp, and there was two soldiers in the English fashion standing guard, pacing back and forth, turning back and forth. He had this Jewish Star. And my brothers wanted to make contact. They didn't know how. And my older brother who always was very ingenious said, "Let's sing a song." And he started to sing Maoz Tsur Yeshuati. One of the guards stopped and said, "Hey, you. Over here. Are you Jew? Are you Jewish?" He said, "Yes." "Come into the camp." They became their mascots. Trucks would stop full of soldiers and say, "Are the boys here?" And then the boys would come down and "Oh, we take to over here and there," and take them on trips. My mother came back and I said, "Mother, there are Jewish soldiers here." And you know what she said? "I never want to

see a Jew again in my life.” Two weeks later she was singing...I think it was .it was New Years. It was Rosh Hashanah or maybe it was Purim or some festival. And she'd changed her mind. She was singing Jewish songs to 46 soldiers.

Q: I want to stop it here. I want to show one picture.

A: Excuse me?

Q: Let's stop it here.

A: Good. We finished?

Q: Yes.

A: Did I talk away two hours?

Q: You talked away 2 hours.