

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Cornelia Schouten
June 8, 1990
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Cornelia Schouten, conducted by Linda Kuzmack on June 8, 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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CORNELIA SCHOUTEN

June 8, 1990

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

Q: Would you tell me your name please?

A: My name? Cornelia Anna Schouten, is my name.

Q: Where and when were you born?

A: In Veenhuizen, I was born January 21, 1920.

Q: Would you tell me about about your family? About your parents...

A: My father was Theodorus Schouten. My father was Theodorus Schouten and my mother was Marta Stam. We first lived in the community of Veenhuizen where my father and mother lived when they got married.

Q: And then what...tell tell us about.....

A: Later, later on we moved to Oosterblokken where my grandfather had a farm.

Q: Tell us about the farm.

A: I was the youngest. The other children already went to school. I went to school in Oosterblokken.

Q: Wwhat what was the farm like? What was what was your daily life like on a farm?

A: We worked. We played. We helped my mother. We helped on the farm. We also helped to milk a few cows.

Q: What happened when...how did your life change? when the Nazis invaded Europe (sic), what happened?

01:03:00

A: My...there was a lot of change. My oldest brother was in the service, and he fought on the front, at the Grebbeberg. It was very difficult because when the Netherlands capitulated we didn't know if my brother was alive or dead. Every day in the village there was news of other soldiers who had fought at the front and who had survived. But we never received any news whether my brother was still alive, and everyone was very sad and worried.

01:04:15

My father went every day to ask about his son, and every day there was news of this one who had returned, or that one who had returned but no news of the oldest son, and finally my father said I am going to go look for him. So then he spent three days searching in barracks and in schools and the war was already six weeks past, six weeks over. After.....After three days my father found him. He was not wounded, he was alive, but he was very apathetic and didn't quite know where he was or who he was. He found him in a school. And brought him home. That's how the beginning of the misery. That's how the war started. In the beginning it was a little bit difficult but in a small village it was fairly peaceful still.

Q: What was it like every day?

A: My brother worked everyday at the farm and slowly but surely he recovered. Daily life was fairly quiet and normal at first in a little village. You didn't notice so much. Then they started rounding up people. At first they took doctors and people who had done something wrong in their eyes. My uncle was also a doctor and was picked up. At that point, people went on strike here and there. In 1942, in the beginning of 1942, they even picked up my father because he had not delivered milk as he was supposed to. That was his way of striking. At seven in the morning, the Germans came with a big truck [used for raids] and all around our place they they were were Germans. And took my father along.

01:09:15

I helped my father get dressed. He was still in bed because he was a little sick and he didn't have (his) papers. My mother was walking in the hall with the mayor of our town, because the mayor had come along because he had to point out the people who were striking because the Germans didn't know where they were living. He was also restraining my brother who was very angry because after all he had been in the war and wanted to attack them. And I was in the bedroom helping my father get dressed and getting his things together. He didn't want to take his wallet and he didn't want to put his coat on but the Germans said he had to take his coat because it is cold on that open truck. So then there was a panic because he left without his ID papers. And we were afraid if he if he didn't have his ID papers he would never get back. Then I biked out. I got on my bike and rode out of the village where they were picking up other people, with his ID papers. I found my father at the German car and gave him his identification papers even though the Germans yelled at me that I was not to go near the car and I succeeded in giving it to him. Then I went home but first I stopped at the church and there I burst in to tears. I went home to my mother. And then this truck was standing at the neighbor's house. He also had a farm. I thought my goodness, now the neighbor will also be picked up but that wasn't true. They were simply asking the neighbors to keep an eye on us. To make sure that nothing would be taken away and that no livestock would be removed and

it was the neighbor's responsibility to see to that. It was a terribly difficult day. Everyone thought my father would never come back. He was brought to Amsterdam, but I don't know where.

01:14:

There they took everything away from him. He didn't have very much with him but what he had they took away. But later that same evening we got news that he was on his way home. But we have no idea why they let him go like that. Sometimes we think the Dutch Nazi Party (NSB) put in a good word for him. Then he told us that in Amsterdam they made him read lists of people who had been shot. His predecessors...

Q: Excuse me. Can I ask something?

A: He had to read lists of names of people who had been shot as an example to him. But he refused. (Laughter) He was very stiff-necked and stubborn. He said I cannot read. So he didn't have to do it. So then he was allowed to go home but he had the audacity to say, well, I don't have any money to get home. He thought maybe they should bring him home again but he somehow got money and was able to get home. We were over-joyed that he was home again. The whole village had thought he would never return. Later on, boys were picked up from the street, young men.

01:17:

They had to go to Germany to work for the Wehrmacht in some way and they went into hiding, underground. That started the period of putting people into hiding and we, from periodically, got one hiding person or another, one fugitive or another. One of them got sick and we brought him to the hospital and we never saw him again. Later on we had a young man from Enkhuizen, that's in our neighborhood, in our area. We also got a teacher from Hoorn who was working in the resistance and had to disappear from time to time. He would ask if he could stay with us. A few months later he asked if his son could stay with us who was at that time in hiding in Zaandijk. For three months he sat in a attic room which he never left. He went crazy. After that he came to stay with us. He was very difficult. Sometimes he spent whole days in bed. Eventually he recovered somewhat and we urged him to get out of bed and to walk outside where other fugitives, were able to walk freely in the country side. We put them to work. They started to help out a little bit, because doing nothing all day long is very difficult.

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They also walked in the street, but they generally stayed close to the house and our farm. In the fall of '42, Laura came to us, or maybe it was '43. I don't remember the year exactly. After the war we didn't talk about it very much anymore. Laura was brought to us on a Sunday afternoon by two men on bicycles from Hoorn. The two men were from

the underground and asked us if we could take a child. Well, we already had several people hiding in our house and I liked children very much, so we thought there was room for one more. And then that was Laura. That was Laura. She was very sad and cried quite a bit because she had already experienced quite a lot. Later on my sister came with her oldest daughter, her little daughter who was a little bit younger than Laura, but we didn't really know how old Laura was until after the war.

01:23:

She was a bit younger. Quickly they started to play and by evening they were having a lot of fun. My father said to my sister, why don't you leave Riet here for a while so that the little girl will get used to us and have some to play with.....they can play together. It worked out very well and soon she began to feel at home. She had experienced so much she was still quite fearful and in the beginning especially at night she often woke up crying and screaming. She had it difficult. I slept in the same room with her. We always did it that way, and when she laid down, I always had to hold her hand. (Laughter) Well, my niece had to leave again because she was in school, and she played with children in the neighborhood.

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Once in a while Riet and Dick were here with me. They would come and play. For the rest I, we all thought it went very well with Laura. She was very happy and cheerful afterwards. And we loved her very much. And Laura loved us. Every week I wrote a card to her parents, so-called, because we really didn't have any idea where her father and mother were. I had to write it and Laura would dictate. No card every came back. So it was kind of unnecessary and so the war went on. Laura went to school. The school was informed they knew it and took care of her. The school was fairly safe although there were searches at school, but they said it would be OK to send her. It was too difficult to keep a child hidden all day long, completely hidden. Even in our own family we had several nieces and nephews who who sort of looked like her and even had dark hair. Everything ran very nicely and evenly. (laughter) She did well in school. There were not that many difficulties any more. Of course once in a while there were Germans in the village and we would get the news of that and then we would just go on out our bicycles. I would visit my.....I would visit my sister or go somewhere else and would take Laura along. The underground took care of it and saw to it that we got food coupons for Laura and the other people we were hiding. She was of course afraid of Germans. When she saw a German she would say, he's not going to do anything to me is he? One night the Germans were in front of our door and that was very scary. All in their uniforms with their boots and then all the people who were hiding in our house had to lay low. I had.....I had to crawl through the house on my knees to warn the adult young men who were hiding of the danger but Laura said, they're not going to do anything to me are they? And, but it was hard to hide her.

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I said just crawl under the blankets. They won't do anything to you and that's what she did. I think she was with us about two years. But we didn't know if her father and mother were still alive or where they were or if they still lived. When she came to us, she said her name was Laura Cruck (ph), but that was not her name and she didn't want that name. She wanted to be called Schouten. So she was Laura Schouten. We thought it was fine. The the war caused many difficulties. There were more strikes. Here and there people were picked up and deported. In that same way, in our village, a gentleman was taken and all the Jews he was hiding in his house and we never saw any of them again. In the villages here and there people would be shot and farms would be plundered or set on fire.

01:33:00

It got very scary. But somehow our farm stayed safe and many people came from Amsterdam to ask for milk , food, potatoes and grain. At night there was alway after we had milked, there was always a long line of people asking for a liter or two of milk. We also had to set apart part of our land for the Germans and give food, part of our crop such as beans or grain, my father had to give to the Germans. We had to grow kidneybeans for the German army. My father sold all the beans himself to people who were happy to have them. For the same price that they would get from the German army or that they would have to pay in the store. In a few days everything was sold out and as far as the Wehrmacht was concerned the harvest had failed. This was our way of striking or resisting. One night a gentleman came to our house and asked if he could sleep over, that he wouldn't need any food.

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Most people who came to the house asked for food. Once he was inside he was quite a big man. Inside of his coat he had a Jewish star. He asked if he could sleep in the hayloft. He said, don't worry, I have my own food. When he took his food out of his pocket it was three large carrots and that was his food. So then we had to cook some food for him so he would have something to eat, but the next morning he took took off and we never saw him again. Every day more people would come from Amsterdam with carts and with bicycles asking if we had anything for them to eat or to get some stuff. It got more and more difficult, these people who came from Amsterdam with their hand carts on barefeet, very very thin and sick. They were, they were all...they would return with sick people in the carts. Sometimes they were dead. Once in a while the resistance would shoot somebody. Once in a while the resistance would shoot somebody, either a German or a Dutch person who had betrayed an other Dutch person, and then there would be terrible retaliation and several people in the village would be killed. They would grab a few people in the village as prisoners and they would be shot. Leaflets would be thrown from planes. One time a nephew was walking in the fields, in an other village and he was met by some Germans. He had some of these leaflets in his pockets and they took him and we

never heard a word of from him again.

01:14:15

My uncle who also had, was also hiding two young men had his house raided and he and the two young men were also taken along and taken prisoner. He he spent three months in prison in Amsterdam and later he was brought to Vught. Those two people who he was hiding did not survive. My uncle was supposed to be sent on transport to Germany but the railroads were on strike and so he didn't go. So in the end he survived. Well, then the war ended. The Germans capitulated. But even that same day two boys who were in the resistance in our village were still shot. The whole village was in an uproar that some, that just at the end two more were shot. We said to Laura, now your mommy and daddy will come soon, but of course we really didn't know.

01:43:11

Actually they were only a few villages away from us in a little tiny house. I thought how can they hide people in that little tiny house. One week after the war, on a Saturday, they came to our house to see Laura. We told Laura here comes your mother and father, but Laura didn't know what was going on. She didn't know what she was seeing, that she was seeing her father and mother again. And she didn't want to have anything to do with them. Which was terribly sad for her father and mother. Of course we were happy because it showed that she had had a good life with us. They wanted to go back to Berkhout, where they had been hidden that same evening and take Laura with them. Laura did not want to come along. So I took Laura on the back, on the back of my bicycle and I went along to Birkhout to that little house where they were hidden. But she stayed very close to me and the minute I took a step she would stay right with me. So then I suggested to the father and mother that they should come along with me until Laura had gotten use to them a little bit again. So that's what they did and we all bicycled back to my house and the father and mother stayed with us for a week. It was of course very difficult but it went a little better. The father wanted to go back to Amsterdam as quickly as possible to see what he could find. To look after his butcher shop and his house. He got a house there and so they left for Amsterdam. Laura was very homesick in Amsterdam. She thought everything at our house was better and the food more delicious than it was in Amsterdam. She had at...with us she had her friends and everyone knew her. So she went to Amsterdam but in the summer vacation she was allowed to come and stay with us again. Well, she agreed to that and she went along to Amsterdam and when the big vacation came, she came and stayed with us again.

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She thought everything at our house was better and on her birthday, the 26th of August, her parents came to get her to celebrate her birthday. But Laura said to her parents, but my vacation isn't over yet. Why don't you just come later. But the mother said yes,

but we'll come for your birthday and we'll celebrate your birthday and then we'll stay a few days and then we'll go back to Amsterdam and that's what they did. Off they went to Amsterdam. After the war my two brothers were getting married. One of, one of my brothers was a priest. He was a divinity student in Nijmegen and he was home for a few days, but there was a railroad strike and he couldn't go back. This is during the war. Until the end of the war he was in ___? ___ and he worked there. At the end of the war, one of the people we were hiding took a tandem bike with him and took him back to Nijmegen. Because the trains were not running normally yet, and so he could finish his studies. I don't know what else I should tell you.

Q: Laura came back to visit you when she 18?

A: Yes. She came to visit in Hoogkasperen, the house of my sister. It didn't work too well. She came with a friend, although we did have someone who could translate. She stayed a few hours but then in the evening she went back to Amsterdam. At first we had news and messages from America and they asked if I wouldn't like to come along to America but my mother was sickly. Later on after the war, my mother became very ill. She had a brain hemorrhage. And was half paralyzed. She was sick for five more years. In 1952 she died. My father, who was always very healthy, also became ill. Fourteen days later he died, after my mother. They were, both of them were 66 years of age.

Q: Where do you live now?

A: I live with my sister in Hoogkasperen-Westwoud. The same year my parents died, Dick's father died of a heart attack. He was only 39 years old. My sister was 38 years old. And she had five children. I worked for an aunt and uncle in Bergen and on the weekends I was with my sister. And so I always stayed.....I always stayed with my sister. During the week I worked in Bergen and on the weekends I was with my sister. I'm still living with my sister who had, also had a brain hemorrhage and is half paralyzed. And I'm taking care of her for the last ten years.

01:55:

My brother, the priest, died two years ago of a brain hemorrhage. My other two brothers have also suffered brain hemorrhages. I'm the only one who is still more or less healthy. Thus you can see it was very difficult to come to America since I have so many problems at home. I hope everything will still be there when I get back. It is, it's maybe not that interesting to you.

Q: I think it's important. Thank you.

A: Is it enough this way?

Q: It is fine. Thank you very much.

A: Thus, I told enough.

Q: Yes.