

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Paula Bronstein
November 10, 2008
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a recorded interview with Paula Bronstein, conducted by Ina Navazelskis on November 10, 2008 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.

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PAULA BRONSTEIN
November 10, 2008

Question: This is a **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Paula Bronstein**, conducted by **Ina Navazelskis** in **Washington, D.C.**, on November 10th, 2008. Dear **Paula** –

Answer: Yes?

Q: – thank you for agreeing to talk with us today, and to share your life story and experiences. And as we always do, let's start at the beginning.

A: Right, right.

Q: Tell me a little bit about your family, where you were born –

A: Okay.

Q: – whether you had siblings, what kind of circumstances your family was in, and how you came to be in this world.

A: Okay. I was born September the eighth, 1937 in **Eindhoven, Holland**. I – at that time I only – was an only child. And that area, until my hiding, I really don't remember much. But, I have a picture that I carry around, that my father used to carry around and now I'm carrying it. It's of my mother, who is wearing the Jewish star, and myself; I was about four and a half, walking in the streets in 1942 in July, visiting my aunt, my mother's sister-in-law, who just gave birth to twins in the hospital. And she's carrying this picture – I'm carrying the picture, but she's

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walking down the so – sidewalk with a bouquet of flowers, which is what you always do in **Holland**; wherever you go, you bring flowers. And myself – and we're both looking very sad, and this is the picture that I'm handing you.

Q: Oh my, yes.

A: And that's – that's the last picture that we have.

Q: The last photograph.

A: To – to th – yeah, the last photograph for that – that period, until after the war.

Q: What a sweet girl.

A: Yes, I think I was. But –

Q: Can you tell me, can you tell me your mother's name, your father's name, what kind of families they came from?

A: Sure.

Q: Okay.

A: My mother's name was **Fayge(ph) Buchla(ph) Rappaport**. She came from **Warsaw, Poland** with her family, and the family was settled – they settled in **France**, I believe it's in **Paris**. But – okay, and that's where my mother had her life and her **[indecipherable]**

Q: So was she a first generation French citizen? Did the fam – when did her family go from **Warsaw** to **France**, do you know?

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A: I don't know the dates. And – it must have been in the 20s.

Q: Okay.

A: I'm sure, because my father, he comes from **Poland**, and his parents – I don't know the city offhand where they came from, but when my father was 14 – fa – either 14 or 16, his father told him go, get out of here and make your life. He put him on a train and wherever you can go, go and try and survive, because there's nothing here. And this is 1928. So – and my father was born in 1911, so he was about 15 - 16, somewhere around that time.

Q: Oh my gosh.

A: And – and that father, his father did that with – they had three sons, and they did it with both –

Q: The three?

A: All three. Because his father was more or less, very religious. And all I know is from the stories that all he did was pray all the time, and I think he was one of, like a **habah**(ph) type of person. His mother named – my fa – my grandfather, my father's father was named, I think, **Isadore**. And my grandmother's name was **Sarah**. And she was a little more educated. So my father traveled wherever he wound up, went to **Germany** and all this, and –

Q: And his name was – your father?

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A: Oh, my father's was **Solomon**.

Q: **Salamone**.

A: **Gerfine**(ph).

Q: **Gerfine**(ph)?

A: **Gerfine**(ph).

Q: Okay.

A: Ah – who had three brothers, **Mark – Marcus** and **Ted**. So, my father came to **Holland**, wound up in **Holland**, and I think that's where he met my mother.

Somehow my mother wound up with her family, live in **Holland** for awhile. And then my mother's family went back to **Paris**, and that's where they settled. My mother had, was a total of five children from her family, and my father had three, there were three brothers.

Q: Did you know your uncles?

A: Yes, I know my uncles. They all settled here in the **States**, all wind up in the **States**. My father – well, my mother passed away in 1960 f – in 1975. That's when we came to **America**, that's another – you know **[indecipherable]**

Q: We'll get there, we'll get there, we'll get there.

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A: Oh, okay. My father passed away in 1997. I found letters at that time that my father had corresponded, or da – my – his parents have corresponded with him from **Poland**, trying to get to **Holland**. And the letters were all in Yiddish.

Q: And what year were they written?

A: 1933 and '34. And I f – was trying to find an interpreter for those letters, and I did, through my child survivors group that I had joined in the 90s. And I had those letters interpreted the best that that person could, because she told me there was a lot of dialects of Yiddish.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And they're writing that they needed money, like five – whatever the currency is

–

Q: **Zlotys**?

A: Yeah.

Q: **Zlotys**.

A: **Slocky**(ph). Five **slocky**(ph) to give to where they were renting a house. And they needed si – they were very, very poor. And by being very, very poor is why he sent his sons away. So, actually from 1920 on, '28 on, my father never saw his parents and the parents never saw their children.

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Q: What a hard thing it must have been for that fa – for your grandfather to do, because he didn't – he didn't send them away cause he wanted to.

A: No.

Q: He want – he wanted them to have a better life.

A: Have a better life, exactly, exactly. And – and then my father just found his –

Q: [coughs] I'm sorry. So we'll continue, okay.

A: Okay. So, my father, I had that picture at home of him getting off the train station, I – either **Germany** or wherever it's at. So he settled in **Holland**, in **Eindhoven**. Somehow became eind – **Eindhoven**. And I – like I said, I believe that my mother's parents came to **Holland**, and that's how my parents met each other. My mother's father was a – a le – dealing in leather goods. And then they wound up back in **France**, and like I said, my mother had five – family of five. She had one sister and three brothers. Three, four, five, yeah. Okay, and –

Q: It's okay.

A: Now what do I say –

Q: So let's go ba – let's go back to your father and his brothers. Did his brothers end up in **Eindhoven** as well, in **Holland**?

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A: One of them – the younger one did. Ther – they were two years apart. The older brother, **Ted**, he – I don't know too much about him, how he wound up in **America**, but he hid on a ship or something like – as a cook.

Q: A stowaw –

A: A stowaway, yeah. And that's how he came to **America**. And – and he's the one who wound up sponsoring us. So, I have a picture, and it must have been before he wound up in **America**, when I'm a – a baby, and my parents are taking me – my father had a **Ford**, a car, and it must have been 1930 – probably 30 – late thies – '37 or '38, and they put me in the back of the car, like a little hammock. I mean, very safe. And I was – that's how they traveled to **Paris**. And I have a picture of my Uncle **Ted** and my parents and me in **Paris**. And that's where my mother's family was, so they traveled to – to visit them.

Q: So, you know your grandfather's push, your grandfather's will got realized pretty early on, because for a young boy of 15 to leave a very poor place in **Poland**

–

A: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

Q: – in the late 20s, and within a decade to have a car, in those years was a huge thing.

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A: Yes, yes. I don't know what he was doing, I – that part, I have no idea. I also have a picture of a very nice, low house, because they're all connected. And the way my mother was dressed, overall, they were doing very nicely, apparently. My father later on, and maybe that's what he did early on, was in the hosiery and socks and so on.

Q: So, you don't know your father's business when he – you know, you don't know how he made a living when you were born?

A: Before – no, no, I do not know. Never talked about it. And the problem is, I never asked questions. You know, children, we didn't ask questions. We had a nice – I was dressed very nicely, everything was fine. So when I saw the pictures, and they were still alive, and I just looked at the picture, oh how nice. But I never asked any questions. I was – I was a child, I just did what had to be done and I listened. And when the time came that I had to go into hiding, I don't know if I asked why, but they always – I think they just gave a story, well, you're gonna stay with – should I say the name? Yeah, not yet.

Q: No, let's – let's – le – we'll get to there. I want to – what I want to ask you now is, what are your earliest memories?

A: My earliest memories, actual, physical memories are from the hiding time.

Q: So you don't remember your life before at all?

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A: No, only what I see on a picture, but nothing, nothing. My hiding life is –

Q: But how old were you when you –

A: Four and a half.

Q: Four and a half.

A: Yeah, cause this is the time, that picture that I showed you, just a little after that is July 1942, we had to go into hiding.

Q: So, what you learn about the – the background to going into hiding is everything from what is to – had been told to you later, okay, is that correct, yeah?

A: Yeah, that's correct, that's correct.

Q: Then, in that case, can you tell me a little bit about what you had been told, and then we'll get to your hiding experience.

A: Okay.

Q: How did your parents explain – was it your mother or your father who told you, or both?

A: No, well, my mother.

Q: Okay.

A: Yes. She said that I had to go and live with these people and they were going to live with some other pe – they were gonna go away, not live, going away to – to be

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with these people, but they'll come back to see me, and we'll all be together again.

And that's a time that –

Q: Do you remember that date? I mean, di – not the date, do you remember being told this, at the time?

A: I – yes, tha-that's when they took me to these people that they knew prior and arranged, made this arrangement that I would go be living with them. They had no children of their own, and – and they, like I said, would be coming back to take me home.

Q: And you remembered being brought there, and –

A: Oh yes, and I remember crying after them leaving, and they were crying and – and I ran after them. And the people that I stayed with, which I wound up calling **Tante** and **Omayya**(ph) are holding onto me and not letting me run too far, but yes, I remember that like yesterday.

Q: Yeah.

A: Those are the memories I – I really have so strongly.

Q: Well, that's not surprising, in a – in a way, because for a child it's so traumatic, when you already know who your mother and your father is –

A: Yes.

Q: And then – and that – you've never known what it's like to not have them.

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A: Oh, absolutely. No, we always seemed to have – I must have had a very good life because there's nothing traumatic for me to – to remember. And it's like children – like my own children, they don't remember that time either.

Q: That's right.

A: Yeah.

Q: That's right. So, what can you tell me about – first from your memory of the people that you were brought to –

A: Yes.

Q: – what kind of impressions you had. And then filling in some of the facts of what you learned later.

A: Okay, okay. The people that I was staying with was – I called her was **Tanta Rowter**(ph), that was her last name, a real Dutch name because she – actually, she was German, but she had lived there for a long time and married this Dutch man called **Yap**(ph) **Rowter**(ph). And they were – had no children.

Q: Were they older people?

A: To – in my eyes, they were older, and they probably were in their maybe late 30s, early 40s. They were old people, because my parents were so much younger. Cause my father – my mother was born in 1912, 1912, and my mother was born in 1911. So in 1942 – well, maybe they were more or less the same age. But – so I st –

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I – I lived with them, I was to be their niece, and I had to live their way, their last name, their religion, which was – they didn't really have much of religion, but there was Protestant. And I was going to be raised Catholic.

Q: They were Protestant and you were going to be raised Catholic?

A: Because they had a – a – a maid, a young girl, 18 or 19, she came every day. And she's the one who taught me the Catholic-ism type of thing. And because that way I could go to the church and with – and go to school with the nuns. So –

Q: And what wi – did you have another name?

A: **Rowter(ph)**, **Paula Rowter(ph)**.

Q: Pa – so you si – made –

A: Just as **Paula** –

Q: – it into **Paula Rowter(ph)**.

A: – **Rowter(ph)**, yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: And that was my name, and I went to school for about three months.

Q: At age four and a half you started –

A: Well, now it's five.

Q: Age five, okay.

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A: Yeah, yeah. And I did the catechis – I – you know, I do remember this church and the nuns and the water that's on the side, and – and I ha – I was so excited, this maid who was there, she gave me a rosary. Oh, and that was such a personal thing that was mine, you know. I don't know if I knew that I had been, or was Jewish. I don't know because I never dealt with that until afterwards.

Q: Well, what was the maid's name? What was she like? You don't remember?

A: I don't remember her name. It was a real Dutch name. And she was very nice, she helped me a lot and – and – and when I was living there with the **tante**, I was normal. I had a normal life. I guess I forgot about my parents, you know.

Q: Well, I wanted to ask you that.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you have any nightmares, did you cry for Momma, or – or – or Father?

A: I don't seem to remember that. But if I really think deeply and go back a lot, that I mu – I think I must have done that in the first few days, because my **tante** gave me a doll with a little carriage to, you know, keep me happy and to just divert my attention. And I think, you know, when I really go deep now that I'm talking to you about that, about my own past feelings and all that, I can see the carriage and I can see the doll. And also I can see her kitchen.

Q: What did it look like?

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A: Was a big kitchen, a real bare room with a big, black stove. And she would be cooking with the maid, who would be helping. I was also with the maid now, helping her clean rooms. See, the people, they ran a boarding house, so they – it was a big house, and they had lots of rooms and the maid would work in the rooms, or clean the bed and the bathroom, and I would be helping her, becau –

Q: That's a na – I-I'm sorry to interrupt, but it's a bit unusual. I mean, the first thing that strikes me is, oh my goodness, hiding a child in plain sight, because if you have a boarding house, you have a lot of people coming through.

A: Yeah, but I was dur – her niece from – wherever that niece came from, where my **tante** was German, but I didn't speak German, I spoke Dutch. So, the niece was either from the husband's side, my **Oma**, cause he was perfectly Dutch, he was all Dutch. And I don't know whose niece I was, but she always said I'm her niece. And like I said, I did go to school for a little bit, and I had a first communion, whatever that age was, I don't know.

Q: Seven – well, usually it's age seven, but it could be earlier.

A: It had to be earlier, cause I was not allowed – the first few months I was out, they had children next door, the neighbor had children, a little boy and a girl, and I would play with them. And they had a, like a – they built a – where you go hide when the bombs come.

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Q: A shelter.

A: A shelter, a shelter. And I would play with these children a few times, and then they start to ask questions of me. I was not blonde and blue-eyed, you know, I was dark haired. And they would say, are you Jewish? And I would ask my **tante**, what does that mean, am I Jewish? She says, now you can never go outside any longer, because the parents of those children –

Q: Were curious.

A: – were – by talking. They also had that big shelter, which they dug down and that's all sand, you know, like a – like a little **[indecipherable]** like a little mountain. And **Tante** had asked the parents if we could go in there if it needed, for the bombs, and they said no. They said no. So they were very anti.

Q: So, did you – when you – when you asked **Tante**, what does this mean, and I Jewish –

A: Yes.

Q: – and she said, you can't go out there any more, did she also answer that you were Jewish, or did she tell you anything?

A: No, no, no, she never told me that I was Jewish. She says, you just cannot play with, those are not nice children, you cannot play with them. Okay, I'm a nice little girl and I listen. And she said, you cannot go outside any more, and I didn't ask. I

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was content in the house. And between her, she was very sweet to me, and my uncle, who was very nice, he – they had no children, they enjoyed – I would – I was allowed to go in the garden with my **oma**, cause he was growing vegetables. I remember that, and I was going with the maid to help clean the house, and I played with my doll. That's what I called, yeah.

Q: Okay, hang on a second, so you stayed home and you'd play with your dolls?

A: Yeah.

Q: Or go out – was their garden visible to the other family, or was it walled?

A: Yes, because there's no walls. In **Europe** there's no walls, at least in **Holland** at that time.

Q: Yeah.

A: No, they had a – a dirt area somewhere, I don't know, because the back of their house had like a water, a little – not a river, but something that flowed, with beautiful Weeping Willows.

Q: Oh, wow.

A: I'll never forget the Weeping Willows, it was just so pretty. Her front yard had like a little fence full of roses. And the house was a very nice house, I – I – when I went back in 1985, I found it and I – but anyway, that's another story.

Q: We'll get there.

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A: Yeah.

Q: We'll get there. And you don't remember feeling that somebody – something was taken from you that you couldn't play with the children any more, you just accepted it and – and went on?

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you continue going to school, to the Catholic school?

A: No, at that time I couldn't do anything any more.

Q: Because of this?

A: Because of this. I –

Q: So they kept you in the house. However, during the few months that you had been there they had gotten you –

A: Yeah.

Q: – they had gotten you to take first communion? That's a huge thing.

A: That's a huge thing is right, but I could not go outside any more after those children. Maybe it was a little longer period than what I'm remembering, because I remember going to the nuns, and I think the nun knew who I was. But they were very nice, very sweet, but I remember doing that, and then I remember I couldn't do anything any more, I had to stay inside. And it got heavier, I think, when the Germans got more prominent there.

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Q: And did they become more prominent there?

A: Yes.

Q: How did this take – how did this unfold?

A: My – because of my **tante** and **omaya**(ph) having this big house – excuse me – the – they had to take in an **SS** officer. He had to live in because they had the room. And that's how heavy it got when he is there and I'm there.

Q: Did you – were – do you have memories of him?

A: Yes.

Q: What did he look like?

A: I don't have a face.

Q: Okay.

A: Just a uniform. Ugly black, horrible black, black uniform with big, black boots. Those uniform and the boots are with me 24/7 if I allow it to come out.

Q: Scary.

A: I don't know his face. Very scary, cause I'm in the house there with people and so on, and now we have this guy there. I sit on his lap, he puts me on his lap, I talk to him like a soldier.

Q: So you remember doing that?

A: Oh yeah.

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Q: And do you remember being scared while you were on the lap?

A: On and off. I kind of got to know him, you know, he was there fo – seemed to me for a long time. Til the end. He was there until the end.

Q: And you don't remember his face?

A: No, I have no vision of his face. I-I either didn't – don't want to remember it – I don't know, because to me the – the uniform is all I know, is the uniform.

Q: And did you – did your – did he seem – why was he scary to you? I mean –

A: Because I have never seen a person with a uniform like that. I mean, that's a horrible thing, I – I am young, and I was – lived in a nice area at home, there was no uniforms. **Tante** didn't have any uniforms. The people that lived there were no uniforms. And then comes this guy with the – the boots, you know, and it click-clacked the way it – that was –

Q: And nobody told you that this is someone to take – this is someone to be careful around?

A: No, they wanted me to be just casual, because I'm – you know, and I was taught, and being me, I was told never say what your real last name is, and just I'm your **tante** and I'm your **oma**, you're just living here with – with me. And that – that was it. He did have other ones, other soldiers came to the house. When that happened,

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when other SS officers came to the house, I had to go to the basement. I wasn't allowed to be around, because –

Q: It could be for many reasons, I mean, i-if a child –

A: Sure.

Q: – is told that it doesn't necessarily mean you're in mortal danger, it means we have too many people in the house, children have to go upstairs. Was that kind of the – or downstairs –

A: Some – yeah, downstairs. Just something, you know, there's too much, and that they're talking and all that, and you'll just be in their way. So I had to go in the basement, and I took my dolly and my – my – my – I forgot the name of it now – the rosacal – what do you call –

Q: The rosary.

A: Rosary, yes, that was always with me. The rosary was my savior. I was taught that that's my savior. Whenever there's something bad, I need to pray with this rosary.

Q: Did you – did you learn prayers?

A: I learned prayers, I don't remember them, cause right the war was over, I did away with all that, and I don't remember that.

Q: But you learned them at the time.

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A: But I remember having them in my hand, and knowing how to inter – interlink them in my fingers, and making the cross, and had my little dolly. And that was it.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah.

Q: And how long did you live at the fa – with the family?

A: Two and a half years.

Q: Did you ever see your real parents during that time?

A: No. No.

Q: That's amazing.

A: That's amazing, that –

Q: That's amazing.

A: – I didn't see them, I didn't – I might have asked my **tante** a few times, and after that I became so much like a child, well, now you're living with somebody else.

This is your life now. This is how you have to survive, and this is – this is it.

Q: How would you describe yourself?

A: As very timid at that time. Not today, but at that time. And always listening to what I was told.

Q: A good girl.

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A: A very good girl, yes, and I s – good girl. Had the big bow in my hair, you know, all that.

Q: And did photo –

A: And whatever they did for me – told me to do, I would do, go with him – **Tante**, go with **Omayya**(ph) now and this and that. Or go with – now I wish I remember the name of that cleaning lady – that mai-maid, or whatever they called her. Yeah, I was. I'm getting emotional. I have – I have not been emotional about this, because I'm emotional about something else.

Q: What about this brings it up?

A: I don't know, about the way I was when I was a little girl, that's all I remember. And maybe cause I miss – miss the people I lived with. They were – they were nice. And you know, when you talk about every little detail, brings back memories, and my state of my – my being at the moment is very touchy because I lost my husband seven months ago, and –

Q: Oh.

A: – I think that's why I'm more emotional than I usually am.

Q: Well, we're also talking about losses. And so, we're starting from the beginning where there are attachments, and then there are losses.

A: Yeah.

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Q: You know, and that's the – when you're a child – I remember growing up – you know, one of our roles is to talk as little as possible, but you know, the – the – it creates a frustration.

A: Yeah.

Q: Because when you have somebody telling you things, you want to say oh yes, and this reminds me of this. Well, let me share with you what this reminds me of. I remember growing up and hearing how much parents love children, you know. I grew up in – in a family where I was loved, and hearing about parents love children. And when I had my own child, this revelation happened, that when I would walk in the room, her face lit up. When I'd come home from work, she would jump up and down in her crib. And I realized, it's a two way street.

A: Yes.

Q: That ch – that love that that child is giving me is real, and I feel it and it energizes me, and it is amazing and it is pure. And there's no farce to it whatsoever, it is genuine.

A: Yeah.

Q: And so when I hear you speak about the people that you were living with, I imagine a little girl who's a good child, who does as she's told, who has this inherent trust that she is being protected by good forces.

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A: Exactly. And now, that's exactly the feeling that it is and that's bringing tears to my eyes because I can't imagine that – that all that happened. But you know, I remember so much of that period, and so much of afterwards, too. But I think it's a little bit because of my –

Q: Also you're going through another loss.

A: Yeah.

Q: Huge loss.

A: Oh yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah. My sympathy to you.

A: Oh, thank you.

Q: Yeah. Are there any other memories that you can come to mind – that come to mind when – through that time that you were with this – with **Tante Rowter**(ph), and **Oma Riap**(ph)? Any other people in the boarding house besides the – the black suited **SS** man?

A: Yeah, there was a – there was a man there and there was a woman there. I don't know their names, but I remember, vaguely, their faces. See, I remember their faces, I remember this girl, the maid, her face, but not this **SS** officer's face. So –

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Q: That's really uncanny, yeah.

A: So maybe inside of me I knew it was danger, because this man with boots and a uniform, that would represent to any child –

Q: Scary.

A: Scary, yes.

Q: Yeah.

A: Exactly.

Q: But – and for you in particular, really scary.

A: Yeah, exactly. I mean, I don't know if we're ready for the end of it, because of something that – that he did at the end, how –

Q: Well, tell u – tell us.

A: – when the war ended. Well, during the war, I – I – with the bombing, two doors down, there was another shelter there, and those people let us in because we did have the bombing scares, and we were in the shelter, and all of us, the people th –

Q: Were these allied bombers?

A: No – ye – yes. Well no, I don't know. No, I think there's – German? I don't know.

Q: Okay.

A: That part I don't know, I – all I know is bombs.

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Q: Yeah.

A: And we all went in there and I remember in that shelter, I prayed like anything, because the girl was with me and I went – boy, I went to town and prayed and prayed and prayed that we wouldn't get hurt.

Q: With the prayers from the rosary?

A: Yeah, with the rosary and the whole thing. Yes, I remember that. I remember the shelter cause they had like shelves of beds, you know, in there in case we had to stay.

Q: A big shelter, yeah.

A: Yes, a big shelter. And when it was over, the raid was over, the house next door to **Tante**, that got bombed, but we did not, our house was saved. So, I – all that praying I did helped our house.

Q: I'm sure of it.

A: Yeah. So, when they ended the war, the two and a half years have gone – well, no – yeah, it must have been at that time, he – he had to leave, of course. And when he left, we stood at the front door, and that's another vision I have, just right now. My **tante** is here, I'm over here, he is outside facing me, and he's looking right at me. And his finger comes up, and he says, **Paula**, now you can go free. Now, he's speaking German, and my **tante** knows German. And I'm standing there and he

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says, you can go free. After he leaves, **tante** looks at me, because now I'm – I'm seven, and she says, he knew. He knew. Now I know that I'm Jewish because I'm seven – I'm older, maybe they told me, or – and then she says, he knew that you were here hiding, or something, another word that she said. And that's what he said, so –

Q: And you remember him saying this?

A: Oh yes, oh yes, oh yes, I remember him standing there, I don't see a face, I see that uniform and that finger coming right at me, pointing. He says, **Paula**, you can go free. So this guy either had a heart, either he has his own child, cause I did sit on his lap, and he didn't turn me or them or anybody in this whole household in.

Q: Who knows, maybe he was the protector of them.

A: And then I thought maybe all my praying worked.

Q: There would be people who will say, absolutely.

A: Yeah. I [**indecipherable**]

Q: Because such things are mir – such things are miracles.

A: Right, right.

Q: You know. And when you – when y – when you heard that, did you have a certain feeling? Did you freeze, did you kind of go numb? Do you remember, like, what feeling unmasks –

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A: Well, I remember I couldn't understand, I didn't quite comprehend what all that meant. So, I'm sure I talked to **Tante** about that and I think what she said is now, pretty soon, Mommy and Daddy are gonna come –

Q: To get you.

A: – to get you, yeah. [indecipherable]

Q: So, she must have known they're still alive.

A: She must have, because she knew that they were coming at a certain day. So, either they were able to, through their hiding place – places, they had several hiding places – my father had a fight with a German soldier on top – on the roof.

Q: Oh my. We can get to that story.

A: [indecipherable] yeah, okay.

Q: Okay.

A: But they must have known how to get in touch with each other, one way or the other, to say this and this date, you know, they're gonna come and get you. But I remember in the house, when it became close to the liberation time, we went – it was e – nighttime I'm not – evening time, it was very dark out, and we went up on the – they had little windows up in the attic, and I guess they heard on the news or something that the liberators were coming. And they were going to come by parachute out of the plane in **Sun, s-u-n**, that's a name of a little town near

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Eindhoven. So we all went up there, I remember that, looking out the window and there's all these white parachutes, one after another, after another, after another, and we were so happy to see that, cause they were going to liberate us, and – and if you watch the movie, the – “**The Longest Day**” –

Q: Mm-hm.

A: – with the Battle of the Bulge and all that, and they talk about **Eindhoven** and they talk about the parachutes coming down. So when I see that movie and – and wait for that particular scene, it just all comes right back and there's just such a great feeling.

Q: Amazing.

A: **America, och, America**, then the soldiers walking down the street and the English ones, the Americans and they give you the chocolate and – and they're wearing nice uniforms, not this ugly, terrible black uniform and oh – that – whenever I would see soldiers, you know, walking around and all that, I just felt oh, they're – they're my savior. They're – they're – they're wonderful, wonderful people, you know, you can trust them. You couldn't trust the ugly ones.

Q: No.

A: No. So –

Q: So when did your parents come?

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A: Well, they came, it was 1945.

Q: Do you remember the –

A: They did not come when **Holland** was liberated in '44. We weren't always – I think, not sure that we were free s – until the war actually was over. And when **Tante** says, now we're gonna go outside and wait for them on the street. And the time came, there they were. A lot of people walking around now and all that, and they came down the street, and I ran to them, I knew them. And they ran to me and that was –

Q: Oh God.

A: – just a – yeah, they made it and I made it and that was a great feeling, very healthy.

Q: Did you feel – when you saw them again, yes, I know you?

A: Mm-hm, oh yeah, absolutely. And they had said they will come back, and they did. And that was – I must say, they stayed a few days at **Tante's** house until they could find a place for us to move into. But that was the last time that I was their little girl. The feeling of parents and children. Because either what they went through – never talked about what they went through, except that only – later on they talked about it in – in – when we were here in **America**, my father would say a few things, and told me what happened to him. But at that time they had to find the

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place, they had to go back and make a living, and there was no closeness. The closeness was gone. I hav – was so close with **Tanta** and **Omayya(ph)**, I didn't have that closeness with them, either because the two and a half years of separation, and I am now a little more grown and loved the way I ha – was being treated for those two and a half years. Now I'm with my parents, who have nothing, and they can't give all that feeling any more. And from then on in, life got hard, life was tough, versus the two and a half years that I had to endure the basement and all that. But –

Q: In what ways was it tough? How was it tough?

A: It was tough because they were so much in their own, with their own problems that they had, and not knowing how to really deal with me, to – in other words, to pick up from the day that they, you know, left me, until the day I – I – we – we were together. The – the feelings just was okay, we have to eat now, we have to do this now and you have to go to school now and – but nothing – I don't remember any, you know –

Q: Warmth.

A: – all of that.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yes. And then my mother got pregnant, so now I have a little brother.

Q: Before we do that –

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A: Yeah?

Q: When you moved away from ta – did you – did you move – then they stayed with **Tante** and **Omayya**(ph) for a few days, and then you moved away with them. Did you go – did you move far?

A: It wasn't a – yes, from – well, in **Eindhoven**, you know, nothing is far like it is here, but still, yeah it was a different area, trying to find where they could somehow – home – they had homes with upstairs and downstairs and – or even three times up. This family was willing to ta – give us part of a – a floor, and I'm sure my father had to pay. And how all that worked I have no idea, it never was discussed about money and nothing – and I feel bad that I didn't ask later on, you know, these things and what can I say?

Q: But that means like, when you were – I – I guess what I'm asking an-and I'm wondering, is that when you'd have, let's say, a lonely moment and you're with your parents, did you have the ability and possibility to go back to **Tante** and spend the afternoon?

A: I could have, but it was a long walk. I didn't have a bike yet, so that was a long walk. That's another thing. Yeah, then we moved somewhere else, I'll tell you.

Q: Okay.

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A: No, at this – this place is just – this was called **Willem de Zwijgerstraat**. My husband **Bernie** and I went there, I know exactly the window and everything. No, it was like a bad area of town.

Q: Okay.

A: But, it was not far from the street that we had lived in prior to the war, **Nassastraat**.

Q: Okay.

A: And this is **Willem de Zwijgerstraat**, you can see from **Nassastraat** the place that we wound up living after the war. So that, from there wasn't – you know, that was in the same area. So I think maybe that's why my parents wound up in that area, cause they knew – and where my **tante** lived, there was a little nicer area. It was separate houses. This was like all low houses and it was a different area.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah.

Q: And – but did you see them then, afterwards? Did you go visit them?

A: I saw them. We did not stay long in this particular place, cause it was a bad – neighbors and a – we didn't. So my father found this other house called **binnin** – in the **Binnaeusstraat**, which was close to **Tante's** house.

Q: And one of the –

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A: And then –

Q: Mm-hm?

A: – I could go, and I walked very often to **Tante's** house.

Q: So you – you didn't have a total cutoff?

A: No, my parents played bridge with them. So, I don't know if they knew them before the war, or if they became friends after the war. That I don't know, but they spend New Year's together, they played bridge at their house or our house.

Q: So, there was – and they got along well, then?

A: Yeah.

Q: See, some other people have said that sometimes there was some tension between the people wh-who saved or hid the children, and the parents who returned.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Either because one was – the parents were unsure –

A: Unsure.

Q: – and the – or the people didn't want to let go, or – or whatever. And you didn't have that.

A: Yeah, I can understand that, not – not – not that I know of, because they knew each other and they – like I said, they got together, played bridge, I remember.

That's when we lived – yeah, in **Binnaeusstraat**, I'm pretty sure. Or was it – I

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don't know which house it was in. No, I was older, it had to be **Binnaeusstraat**.

They would pull up the rug. My uncle was there, **Omayaph**, **Tante** and my parents, listening to the radio, putting up music, and they danced.

Q: How nice.

A: And that's how I learned – my **Omayaph** taught me how to dance, me standing on his feet, and I learned how to dance the foxtrot, and the English waltz. And I'm now – oh, I'm eight or nine or 10 or something like that, yeah.

Q: After the war.

A: After the war. That was nice, but then it also – that was a nice day or something, but the regular days, going to school was not nice, because I was the only Jewish girl, and everybody made fun of me, you know.

Q: Really?

A: Oh yeah. So the years after were not –

Q: So why did they – I mean, da – **Holland** has such a reputation –

A: Yes.

Q: – of being open and tolerant, and –

A: Well, there were a lot of them that weren't.

Q: Yeah.

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A: There's a lot of them that weren't. There were a lot of people who got turned in by – we were very, very fortunate. And – and **Tante** dealt with it very good.

Q: What was it like in school, what were the kids saying? Do you have memories of that?

A: Well, they wouldn't talk to me because I looked different for some reason, I don't know. And they weren't – especially the boys, they were nasty, yeah. Some of the girls were okay. I have a book, they call it a **poetsy(ph)**, it's – you ges – it's like a poem book that all – everybody in school would get that, with little paste things, stick-ums that you put in there and then you write a little poem of the person that – you know, like you do at high school here –

Q: Sure.

A: – they – they write –

Q: Autograph books and things.

A: – something like that. And I do have that book with – there were two girls that lived around the corner in **Willem de Zwijgerstraat** when I first started school. Her name – one was **Anika(ph)**, and there was a little redhead, ri-wi – **Rita**, I think her name was, something like that. And they wrote in my book. But I would never want – went to their house, I couldn't associate with them, so only at school.

Q: Sounds like a lonely chil – a lonely time.

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A: Yeah. Oh, I was very much by myself, very much. And then when my brother and sister came along, I had to take care of them. Now, we're nine and 11 years difference. And if I wanted to go outside and did play with the marbles, you know, the little children's play, I had to take my brother with me. I was always like a caretaker of them, and I had to help. I never had a time, you know, by ourselves. Later on, we got a little older, the Jewish area built up a little bit, and there was a youth group area, and that's where I met this girl named **Frieda**. And a lot of the Dutch people know her too, and she knows a lot of people. And we've been in touch ever since, together. But the only nice time I had with a girlfriend, and that was her, because she was Jewish, and she lived quite far away, but I had a bike then, and we'd bike to her. And she had little cooking utensils and we would cook applesauce from scratch. That was a big thing.

Q: Sounds like fun.

A: Yeah, it was fun, but then, that was a day of having a nice day, but the rest of the time, this – in **Willem de Zwijgerstraat**, the house that we were in was right on the corner and there was train tracks right next to it. And several times the train would stop, and it was loaded with coal. So I had to go and get a – a pail and **[indecipherable]** and climb up in the train – and everybody else did that, mostly guys – and I had to climb up there and steal the coal, so we would have coal in the

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house. Now, the train must have stopped there maybe for a purpose, I don't know, but –

Q: No, not fun. Not fun.

A: – I was **[indecipherable]**. Not fun. I didn't have a teenage years. There was nothing about me, you know. Very, very little.

Q: Were y – did you get on with your parents in a different way, or was there distance, they were too busy, or – tell us – tell me a little bit about how – how that went, how that evolved.

A: You know something, I don't know any details, but I remember my two and a half years with **Tante**. My – the rest of my years before I came here is mostly what I remember ome – you know, ask my mother, I want to go after school, go and play with them. No, you have to do this, and you have to take care of your brother and you have to take care of your sister. Or you have to help me, and you have to do this and you have to do that. That's all I remember.

Q: No fun.

A: I don't remember no closeness, where my mother say, oh let's go shopping, just you and I, let's go, you know. No, because my father was gone basically seven days a week, earning a living, trying to earn a living by selling his socks and so on, on

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the mart, different cities. On the weekend, on Saturdays, I would have to go with him, because you have to unpack the pack.

Q: So you weren't religious? It wasn't if –

A: No, no, there was no religion. She never benched th-the light, the candles –

Q: What does that mean? Ah-hah, she didn't –

A: [indecipherable] no. I've never done it either. I do remember going to a temple, I do. Another thing is I remember I was being taught by a rabbi to read Hebrew.

And that's when we moved to **Binnaeusstraat**. I was a little older, and I remember going to the temple once. But no, nothing for holidays, except Friday night we had chicken soup, you know, and **Paula** gets the – the – I got a – a polka – a leg and a neck, that's what I got. But see, my wardrobe consists of two of this and two of that, and that was it. Little skirt and a little top, I don't remember my mother taking me shopping or anyth – I don't remember any of that.

Q: How sad.

A: Because the other part overtook that, always having to take care of them, that I just was –

Q: You were gone. You weren't there.

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A: I wasn't – I was just there to be – for that purpose. I didn't have that closeness being the daughter, the first daughter, you know. And that's – could very well be because of what my parents went through, and I'm sure that's it.

Q: Did they – when di – did they ever talk to you about any of it?

A: No. No. Oh, you don't know, and you don't need to know, or you don't remember anything, you were too young, and – nothing. So either they were protecting me, I don't know why, you know, that's – I don't think so.

Q: A lot of people thi – a lot of people – I – I think that this is something that comes up a lot in – in future relations after some traumatic event. A-And it's more than trauma. I mean, it is – it is when people have been subjected to humiliations. When people have been stretched to their limit, they think that – that if they don't say something, they can keep that kind of vulnerability from the children –

A: Yeah.

Q: – and maybe their children will be protected from it. But then another hole develops, you know?

A: Of course.

Q: In that child, or in the relationship, that there's a silence there.

A: Right.

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Q: And – and it's hard. It's hard, I think, to know when is the rent – when is the right time? Am I damaging my child if I say something? Am I going to lose it if I say something?

A: Right, right. So, I know that all the time I lived in **Holland**, I would never say that I was Jewish, I would never talk to anybody about it. I tried to assimilate or be like everybody else, but yet, I knew I was different, because there the fi – the girls at school, their – their way of doing things, the way the ate, the way they – their behavior was so different than mine. I had uns – not really n – realizing it, I had this stuff on my shoulder of what happened to me, and I could not talk about that. So, I always was different, and that took me a long, long, long time to get out of it. The only time I could – finally got out of it is when I joined the survivor, the child survivors' group.

Q: That's a long time.

A: Before that – a very long time. Not until the early 90s.

Q: That's amazing.

A: Yes. I would not talk, I worked and I – and – and people find out, oh, you're – you're from **Holland**. Yes. Were you there during the war? Yes. Well, what happened? Nothing. You know. How I'd never wear a Jewish star, I – I have o – I have them, but I wouldn't wear them. I'd – never the identification that I'm Jewish.

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And that only – even in **America**, you know, at the beginning, I wouldn't say that I was – not Jewish, but in hiding.

Q: Take me up to the point where you're already an adult – I mean, if there is more to add to, teenage years or other events that you want to remember, or something significant about your parents and – and – and what happened during the war years, fine –

A: No, I just – I think I – I kind of talked about that, because they wound up being friends and they s – you know, played cards together and – and – well, we just had a very simple life, nothing exciting, it was just surviving life.

Q: Yeah.

A: And that was it.

Q: And you came to the **United States** in 19 seven –

A: '50 – '53.

Q: Oh, in 1953?

A: '53, with my parents.

Q: Oh, I see, I see.

A: Yes.

Q: So, you left **Holland** fairly early on?

A: Yes, I was 15.

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Q: Okay.

A: Yeah. So then my Uncle **Ted**, who had gotten here somehow –

Q: Yeah.

A: – from **New York**, he wound up in **California**, and he sponsored my father, for us to come. And so we came in '53. We took the – the – my father came in 1952, he –

Q: To set the – s-see – yeah.

A: To see [**indecipherable**] yeah, to see how it's gonna work.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And then my parents, my mother had to sell the furniture they had. I don't know how they got all this furniture back after the war, or I don't know anything about that. So we came on the – we first went to **Paris**, her family lived in **Paris**, so, to say goodbye. And – oh, during the – before that, when I was younger, my mother sent me to **Paris** to live – to visit my grandparents. Now, my grandparents spoke French and Yiddish, I spoke Dutch. I understand Yiddish, but I can't speak Yiddish.

Q: When you were a baby, was it – did they speak to you in Dutch, your parents, or in Yiddish. Before the war. Do you know?

A: I don't know.

Q: You don't know.

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A: I don't know.

Q: You just know that you spoke Dutch.

A: Oh, yes.

Q: Okay.

A: I know I spoke Dutch and I could understand Yiddish, from hearing it from them, I suppose. So I – I did spend a week in **Paris** with my gram – grandparents, and we couldn't really communicate. So we went – before we left to come to **America**, we went to **Paris** and – to say goodbye, and board the **Île de France** ship. And we took the ship across; took about seven days I believe. And me with motion sickness, that didn't work too well, but – so we got to **New York**. My mother's girlfriend from **Europe**, who lived now in **New York**, picked us up and we stayed for one day and then we caught the train to go to **California**.

Q: Oh my.

A: And we were on a train and with my little brother and my little sister and me, so I had to deal with that. And then we come to **Los Angeles**, and my uncle and my father pick us up, and they drive us to this – the mountains, which is unbelievable to see, huge. It was very scary, because **Holland**, you know, is flat. So the drive – we come to this area where my uncle had a quote, a ranch, he ca – which he called the Bar Mitzvah ranch. He had a cow, skinny than anything, and several animals, and

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chickens, and that was the ranch. So we come now there, and my father had a trailer there, small trailer that he was living in, and now there's four of us. No – yeah, four of us coming and – in that trailer.

Q: In the trailer.

A: Of course there's no room. **Paula** wound up living in the house. I had a room that my **Tante Ted's** wife, **Clair**, and she took me under her wing. She told me, you gotta get a haircut, you gotta take off these little gold earrings, they're childish and you gotta grow up now. Okay. So, ti – they sent us to school, I went into the eighth grade just for a few months, cause we came in March of '53. And I went to this eighth grades class, where they assigned one of the pupils that sit next to me, to kind of teach me what's going on. Now, I had some English, a little knowledge, cause at school in **Holland**, the – the high school there, you learn all these languages. I learned Dutch – of course, Dutch; English; French and German. Which I hated. So – so, come September, we're moving now to this town called **Lancaster, California** and my father now has a chicken ranch, 20,000 chickens.

A: Oh, my gosh.

Q: Tiny baby chicks, and he's raising chickens. That becomes his livelihood in the **States**, where he was more of a businessman.

Q: Poultry farmer.

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A: Yeah. And he buys this property with a house, one bedroom. And now, you know, the five of us. So, my brother, sister are small and they live – they sleep on a couch that makes into a bed. That house had like a little outhouse, not a bath, but an outhouse there, just a – a little room, and that's where I'm – I'm at. There's no heat, no air conditioning. They did have some light that they hooked up from the laundry room, which was next to the garage. And that's where I'm now. I have no – I have nothing of me, I'm just always being outcast, you know. Okay, **Paula**, you do this **Paula**, that, and – and I had to work in the chicken house before school.

Q: The minute you – yeah, the minute you said to – you said to me he was a poultry farmer, I thought, oh my gosh, that's labor intensive.

A: Yes. And everyday before school, after school, seven days a week, I had to help feed the chickens.

Q: I would have thought, I can't wait to get away from here.

A: And it was all manual. Eventually he wound up getting automatic feeders and automatic water, but not while I was there. And – and my little brother, who's six, he also had to start helping. And the school, we had to go by bus to school, and I had never the opportunity to go with some of the friends, or girls at the school, to go to a movie, or visiting them, or spending time with –

Q: Being a kid.

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A: – girls, being a teenager.

Q: Yeah.

A: Nothing. Absolutely nothing. When I was in **Holland** –

Q: Did you have fights with your parents, or were you so quiet you just kind of gave up?

A: I didn't fight, because it didn't lead to anything, I still have to do what I – what I had to do. I told them I didn't like it, but I had to help support, you know, the livelihood. I also, across the street, there was a family there that had no children, and she needed somebody to clean the house. So, besides doing the chickens and all that, I went there, but I loved it, because it was an American house. She had a piano, and I was able to do a little piano. And I, for lunch she would make me a sandwich on this nice bread, and I got to drink a Coke. And so, I enjoyed that, that was my enjoyment. Yeah, I'm a teenager. She'd be doing so many other things, and this is what I was doing. So I was really kept back and I became a late bloomer.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you go to college?

A: No, no. I – I got married right after high school.

Q: To **Bernie**? How'd you meet?

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A: **Lancaster** had the beginning of a temple in – in a house. And we did go to that, because we got to meet people there, you have a congregation. There's a woman there, when she saw a new girl in the group, there was a – I think there was one – one boy there, **Matt** was his name, who went to high school, and I went to high school there and she was going to try and fix me up. You know, in those days, you got married very early. So she was trying to fix me up and she found **Bernie**. Shall I talk about how he got to **Lancaster**? He was new y – he comes from **New York**, the **Bronx**. He comes from a – a six kids family. And he came to visit his brother, who lived in **Lancaster** and worked at **Edwards Air Force** base, **Lou**. And he came in November of '54, got off the plane, dressed with the – it was so cold in **New York** and he comes to **California**, his brother picks him up in shorts and sandal and hawa – a shirt, a Hawaiian shirt. He turns and he tells him – and he calls his mother when he got settled, I'm never coming back to **New York**, cause this is wonderful. Anyway, he gets a job in haberdashery, in men's clothing, and this lady, **Belle Miska**(ph) found him at the store, at – **Herman's** was the name of the store, and she s-says, oh, I have a girl for you. And he was 24, and now I'm 17. So, she wound up at – in a – a meeting for her – for me and him, and so that's how we met. And I invited him to my graduation and he took me out, I had my first shrimp dinner. And I'm 17, and I'm still a little unaware of anything, I don't know a thing

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that's going on in life, I'm so **uck**. But I got – we got engaged on my birthday in September, and we got married in December.

Q: Oh my.

A: So, it was a six months togetherness, and he would come and visit us every Sunday in the afternoon and – anyway, so I got out of that house. I could not deal with it. It was either that, my Aunt **Clair**, who had moved away from the Bar Mitzvah ranch to the **San Fernando Valley**, I was gonna go live with her and go to college, one – one way or the other. So that's how I met **Bernie**. And I had a whole new life, and it's – then it was good, and it was good for 52 years.

Q: Oh, that's wonderful.

A: Yeah.

Q: That's wonderful. How many children did you have?

A: Three sons.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: **Martin, Danny** and **Joel**, and I have two grandsons from **Danny**, and their names are **Aaron** and **Kevin**, and they are now 18 and 20.

Q: Too young to be a grandmother o-of grown boys.

A: Well, yeah, see, I got married so young, and –

Q: Yeah.

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A: – and wanted to have a family.

Q: When did you learn about what your parents had gone through?

A: In **Lancaster**, later on in years, when – of course when I was married, and we would visit, and somehow it's – we talked a little bit. I started to ask some questions of them. My mother would never talk about it.

Q: Were they together in hiding?

A: Yes, they were together, so I think she let him, if he did talk, you know. And he would mention some names of where they were, but they went to different houses, because they got turned in. And –

Q: Oh, they – someone betrayed them?

A: Yes, yes, several times. And they ran acro – from ups – from the attic, cause they were in the attics, they climbed out the window, on the roof, and ran to other houses, to get back down, out in the street.

Q: And is it on one of those roofs that he met this –

A: So – yes, on one of them he told my mother to keep on running, and he wound up fighting with a soldier. Now, he had a billy club, and I don't know if the soldier had a gun or not, because there was no shooting involved, but there was fighting, and the soldier hit my father on the nose with the billy club, and it was bleeding

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very heavily. And somehow, with however it went, he got away from that soldier.

And were – and then they wound up at other places, but I don't know anything else.

Q: Of their – nothing?

A: Of their – no, no, I have no information. And that's all he ever talked about. He only talked about his heroism of fighting that soldier. But otherwise, I – I don't know anything else. And that's all he talked about, you know, that particular scene, over and over and over.

Q: It really sounds that there wasn't much closeness between yourself and your parents.

A: No.

Q: What a grief.

A: Yes. Even when my brother and si-sister were older, and my sister would come and visit my mother with her children or so on, my mother would call me and say oh – my sister's name is **Helen** – **Helen** is here today. Now, I have three sons and – and I'm working full time. I said, oh, that's nice. And my mother would say – see, that's just the conversation I remem – remember – she would say, why don't you come over? And I said, well, I'm busy with the kids, I'm doing the wash and I have to go grocery shopping, all this and that. I said, why doesn't she come here and visit me? Well, she has one of the babies, they're sleeping, the babies are sleeping. I said,

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so? You have the baby in the carriage or wherever you traveled, you know. What difference does that make? My mother would always stand up for my younger sister. And there was never any – any close – a real closeness, there was not.

Q: And wa-wha-what about with your brother and your sister?

A: With my brother, he had a very rough time. He had a very bad time when he was young, he had no life either. He became a stutterer.

Q: Oh dear.

A: And he worked in the chicken ranch, how – whatever. My husband and I, **Bernie** and I would, if we would go for the day to the beach – I loved the ocean, we would go to the beach, we would ask **Helen**, my younger sister to come along, and she would come along. She did not have to work in the chicken house, she pretended that she would faint. So, she's the baby –

Q: She figured it out.

A: She figured out, and she didn't work in the chicken house. So that only left my brother, after I left. And we would ask, well nor – my brother's named **Norman** – for him to come and spend the day with us, and my father would always say no, he stays here with the chickens and those five acres, that's what the property was he had, this is the place for him.

Q: Oh, what a poor boy.

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A: Yes, he – he had a very – he joined the – the army right away when he was old enough, and – and he's – he's always had a problem. Also very slow, and not worldly, you know. That was – that was rough, yeah.

Q: Did you maintain ties [coughing] oh, bless you, hang on. Did you maintain contact with **Tante Rowter**(ph) and **Omayya**(ph)?

A: When I came to this country, we kept writing letters. Cause before we left, you know, I did say goodbye, and I think we cried. She – she re – she really cared for me. And so then we were in touch with letters. I could never afford to go back to **Holland** until – not until 1985. She passed away. I would get the letter with the black border. First **Omayya**(ph) passed away, in the early 60s. And then **Tante** passed away July 31, 1975, which is the same day my mother passed away.

Q: Oh my.

A: Double whammy, yes. I had made an afghan, I crocheted an afghan and sent that to my **tante**. And she s-started to get ill. And then, after the funeral, whenever that, then I got this letter showing her – that she died and – the same day as my mother passed away. So that was –

Q: That was tough.

A: That was hard, yes.

Q: That was tough.

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A: Yeah, it's very hard.

Q: Did they have – did they have children – no, they didn't have children –

A: No, they didn't have children.

Q: – but did they have family? What happened with their house?

A: I don't know, cause I never knew the family.

Q: Oh.

A: I never found out anything. If my **tante** wrote something in the letter, I don't know where they're at, or where it was. And in 1985, when we were able to come – go back, **Bernie** and I went – wanted to go to **Holland**, we stayed – we stayed in a – in a hotel in **Heeze**, which is outside of **Eindhoven**, and I said, okay **Bernie**, I n – I know exactly where to go to the house. My girlfriend **Trix(ph)** from school, I've always been in touch with her, she's not Jewish – and we always corresponded. So they came to the hotel, and I told him how to go to the house in **Huidenstraat** also, but then **Trix(ph)**, I think, knew where that was. But **Bernie** and I had done that first. And I could tell him, you take this street and that street, I don't know how I did that, but anyway, we got to the house in 85, and my – my friend says, **Trix(ph)** says, oh, why don't you get out and ring the bell? Well, I was frozen in my seat, I could not get out of my – the car. I started to cry and I said, but if I ring the bell, it's – **Tante** isn't there. There's other people living there. I don't want to see the way

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the house is for them. I want to remember the hou – how the hou – how the house was for me, with **Tante**. So I never did go in there.

Q: You didn't [indecipherable]

A: No. But, there were the roses outside in the front, and then we drove, cause it's next to a – a plane, we drove around there and got to the back of the house with that water and the Weeping Willows and all that, and it just phew, floods, you know, comes back of memories. And that – that – that was good, that – I needed to do that. But there was nobody else there that I knew, yeah.

Q: And in 1991 you say, the first time you felt like you could have that burden lifted from you, is when – or put words to things, was when you joined the child survivors.

A: Yeah, I joined it early 90s, I don't exactly – was it '92, I – I don't quite remember the year, but I know it was in the very early 90s.

Q: What happened when you joined?

A: When I joined that group, and they had group workshops or whatever you call them, and I got there and I see all these people who have gone through s – this type of, you know, either in camps or hiding, I was just overwhelmed, I was just shocked that there's so many people. I didn't know.

Q: And it wasn't just you?

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A: Yeah. And then I – it – the person who held that workshop was **Daisy Miller**. I don't know if you're familiar, but she's – she did the whole – the conference here, part of it. But she was so good and she's – people are sitting there and they're talking about what happened. And I don't know if I spoke the first time that I went or not, because I was just overwhelmed. I know **Bernie** stayed outside, he said he didn't want to go in, so he stayed outside. And – and maybe I did say, you know, I'm – I was – they must have asked where I'm from, and I said from **Holland**. But most people were from **Amsterdam**, not **Eindhoven**, no, I haven't found anybody, except my friend **Frieda**. It was just unbelievable, and people were talking and all that. And it just – I thought, wow. So I went often, whenever they had the meetings, and I started to talk. And it felt so good. It felt so good to do that, that I was getting a little courage. And I started to f –

Q: Did your children –

A: – I started to find out a little bit about me, you know. Yeah.

Q: Did your sons ask you, as they were growing up?

A: No. I really – I – I didn't talk about it.

Q: Do they ask you now?

A: No. I have talked and told them, my grandkids and everybody, they know. But they never come to me and say, you want to talk, or ask questions. They don't. They

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all feel – when you go to these groups, sometimes the subject is, are your children, or do your children feel that they are hindered or something, because of the mo – par – the mother's background, you know –

Q: Yeah.

A: – going through the Holocaust? And I thought to myself, no. They've never talked about it, never said, oh, because you did this, that's why you're the way you are, and something. So when I came home I asked them. I called them and I asked them that particular question. And their response was, what are you talking about, Mom? What? There's nothing there because of you. No, you were always okay, that – but I don't know. I'm very confused.

Q: It doesn't sound that way. It doesn't sound that way. But you never know what kind of effect – when you're living, you don't know what kind of effect the things that you have experienced could have on a person who wasn't there.

A: Right.

Q: You don't know those things.

A: No, no. But –

Q: And you asked the question.

A: I asked them –

Q: You gave them –

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A: I asked, because I also heard so many people tell me that their children, even grown up now, have a real, severe problem, so many of them have to have therapy.

Q: Well, it could have been that for you in your life, it sounds like your parents were stripped bare of, you know, of whatever giving they might have been able to give. And so it sounds like there was a real ef – cause effect of what the war did, and their –

A: Yeah.

Q: – and their hiding. But that doesn't necessarily mean that it goes on to another generation.

A: Right.

Q: It possibly, but not necessarily.

A: Not necessarily. Well, the one thing that I know when I got married with **Bernie**, when I was 18, he comes – well, he is, and I guess he comes from very strong parents who came from **Russia**. And growing up in **New York**, you have a different way of growing up than I did, of course, but he always told me that I should become more independent and be strong. And he – he really had influenced me for that, and it helped. He never said, oh, you don't need to go to these meetings, that doesn't gonna help you, you know, and he was always there, and wanted me to do what I needed to do. And he was my support, so –

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Q: Sounds like he loved you very much.

A: Yeah, he did. He did. I loved him very much. He was a wonderful guy. He was a good father, very good husband. He was – I have a picture here of him and me for our 50th anniversary. And he really made my life full and – and complete and – and with no hang-ups. And I – I – I'm very, very blessed for that, because he – he made me stronger, and he made me appreciate everything and it was just – he was the right guy for me. I didn't have much – much experience of dating other guys in – in **Lancaster**, but the ones that I dated were all flakes. And then here comes this strong guy, and he had a nice brother, and very – that was a very, very good life, yes. So I miss him.

Q: I can imagine. I can – I can only imagine.

A: Yeah, I know, I know.

Q: Yeah. Is there anything else you'd like to have in this story, in this interview that we've had today that you think is – we haven't touched on, that is important?

A: Well, I don't know, it's – it's mostly now because of **Bernie** not being with me any more, I have to be myself and – and find out who I am on my own, and I have the support of my sons, and of dear friends, even Holocaust friends that I have acquired through the groups, and we're close, we go to movies and keep is – ourselves busy. Basically, I think, having gone into this whole – my whole past

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history, has been so good to be able to unload it. Even though I've done at the meetings and so on, but on a one to one basis, I've never done that, and – and –

Q: Well, thank you.

A: – you are wonderful, you really brought it out to me and – and it's been very, very – very good –

Q: Well, thank you, that – that's a –

A: – emotional, it – very good.

Q: Thank you very much.

A: Yes.

Q: I appreciate that.

A: Thank you for being you and – and helping me get – get going on this. I really do –

Q: You've shared.

A: Yes.

Q: And – and it's been a gift.

A: It really has. Thank you.

Q: So, this concludes the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Paula Bronstein**, on November 10th, 2008 in **Washington, D.C.**

Conclusion of Interview