

We can start? OK?

Camera's rolling.

All right. This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Wilhelmina Juhlin, on July 16, 2015, in Morristown, New Jersey. Thank you very, very much, Mrs. Juhlin, for agreeing to speak with us today to share your story, to share the story of your family, and to let us know a little bit about what your destiny was as a result of German policies, Nazi German policies, during World War II.

I'm going to start our interview at the very beginning. And the first three basic questions that I have is, could you tell me your date of birth, your place of birth, and what name you had at birth? That is what name you were given at birth.

My date of birth is November 14, 1939. I was born in the Netherlands in Schoorl, which is somewhat north of Amsterdam. And my name at birth was Wilhemina Monika de Kadet. But now, I am known by everybody now as Willie - very Americanized.

Yeah. It's a lovely nickname. So can you repeat the name of the town you were born in again. I'm not familiar with it. Schkorin?

Schoorl.

Schoorl?

Mm-hmm.

Schoorl.

Near Alkmaar.

Ah, is that on the coast?

No, it's not on the coast.

And about how far north of Amsterdam would it be?

In kilometers I don't know. But I think it would take you about an hour to drive north there.

Were your parents from this town from this place?

No, my parents were from Amsterdam.

OK. How did it come to be that you were born there?

Because when they married, they moved there. And there was-- my father and his family had a business there. So I think he wanted to be near to that area.

What was the business?

The business was a factory that made condensed milk in tubes.

Condensed milk in tubes? I wonder how that must have looked like.

Well, it looked very interesting, because I do have some footage of it where actually workers are seen on an assembly

line, on a 1938 or so assembly line making these tubes of milk.

Isn't that interesting? Let's cut for just a second. So you say there was footage of workers actually pouring this milk into tubes?

Right, on the assembly line. But previous to that on that same footage, it shows the factory being built in a very small town called De Rijp, which isn't far from Schoorl. And it shows my mother laying the cornerstone. And it shows the workers laying the bricks.

That's so unique, very unusual. Can you tell me how your family then, probably your grandfather or other generations, came to be in this business?

That I can't tell you because I don't know.

OK.

I don't know. I think it was just in the family.

And did your father have more siblings or was he--

My father was one of three.

OK.

He had a brother and a sister.

[PHONE RINGING]

Oh, that's my phone.

OK. Tell me a little bit about your father. What was his name?

His name was Ludwig.

Ludwig?

Ludwig de Kadet. But he's known as Lou. So when my son was born, his middle name is Louis, because even at that time-- my son is now in his early 40s-- I didn't know that my father's official name was Ludwig. I always thought it was Louis.

Oh, really? Now that's also an interesting fact, because how would one find out? How did you find out that your father's real name was Ludwig?

Because I'm sort of the genealogist in my family and I did some research-- later on, because growing up I really didn't know, I wasn't interested, and so on. I had growing up things to do. And later on in life, I became very interested in the genealogy of this fairly large convoluted family, both on my paternal and maternal side, where there were lots of siblings and there was a time when cousins married cousins or second cousins because their world was smaller than it is now and they didn't have the chance to reach out or a dating service to meet--

Yeah, other people--

Other people.

Was your family an old Dutch Jewish family?

Yes, it was. Yes, it was.

In your genealogy research, were you able to go many generations back?

I went back as far as the mid 1700s to show you the different cousins and sisters and brothers and so on.

Was this all from the de Kadt side.

No, a lot of it was from the maternal side.

OK. What was your mother's name?

My mother's name was Sonja Rita Swaap.

Swaap?

Mm-hmm.

And also an old Dutch family?

Also an old Dutch family. Her maiden name was Loopuit-- not her maiden name-- her mother's maiden name was Loopuit.

Where did you conduct most of this genealogy research? Here in the States or--

Here in the States, yes, because I grew up here.

But the documents, were they Dutch documents?

Some were, yes, some were Dutch documents. And some were interviews, informal interviews of various family members who aren't around anymore to ask.

OK. So let's go back to 1930, the late 1930s, and just preceding your birth. Your father moves there to-- I can't pronounce--

Schoorl.

Schoorl, and the factory is built. How large a place was it?

It wasn't very large. No, it wasn't very large to my knowledge. And when we went back, my brother, his daughter, and I went back-- I think it was around 2002 or '03-- that factory, which was confiscated in the Nazi era, is now a furniture store.

Did you speak with the owners of the--

We did. We did, because that cornerstone is still there. They preserved the cornerstone.

Did they know the building's history?

They did somewhat, yes. They did. And he was very accommodating.

How interesting that--

Yeah, it was very interesting.

Yeah. OK, so your mother's side of the family, can you tell me a little bit about her family, her background, where they came from, and so on?

Well, they were an old Dutch Amsterdam Jewish family. My grandfather was in the diamond business. And you know, Amsterdam was a hub for that, as well as Antwerp. She has-- my mother has-- had two sisters, the youngest one of whom also died in Auschwitz. But her older sister, my aunt Ella, still lives. She's 97 years old. She lives in Cliffside Park, New Jersey, on her own, in very good health. She plays a lot of bridge. I think that's the secret to old age.

[LAUGHS]

People say it's good healthy living. I say it cigarettes, liquor, and bridge.

It's bridge, yeah.

Wonderful, wonderful.

Yes.

Can we cut for just a second? That's an amazing fact that your aunt Ella is still around, still with us today. And did she tell you many of the stories of the family, of your mother's family?

She did, yes. And now, although she is in good health, some of those facts have become rather fuzzy.

Yeah, that happens. That happens. So your parents are there. Your father has two siblings, a sister and a brother. Is that correct?

Correct.

And were either of them in the business as well?

Not to my knowledge. Certainly not the sister.

OK, so it would have been your grandfather and your father. What was the name of the company? Of the milk--

Milk company? Het Nieuw Beemster.

Het Nema--

Nieuw, new.

Nieuw.

Het Nieuw Beemster. And I've been trying to find out what is the meaning or why did they call it Beemster. In fact, I tried to find that out very recently, and nobody seems to know. If it's an acronym for something, I have no idea.

Have you researched the documentation if there's documentation for the company?

No, I've not. No.

OK.

No.

Because I wonder whether in the old municipal archives there may be some mention of businesses that were formed in the '30s and early--

That might be an interesting thing to do if I go back one day. But my Dutch-- my Dutch, I can understand it. But my Dutch language skills are severely lacking, because at the time that I came to the US in 1946, it was the melting pot.

Of course, of course.

Become acclimated and acculturated as quickly as possible, which my grandmother enabled us to do. And being that young-- I was six at the time-- being that young, I lost my native skills.

It happens with many children, particularly at that age. Children are like sponges, and they absorb a new environment and absorb a new language quite easily, often at the expense of the older one.

Right. Which isn't done anymore now.

That's right. That's right. So you're born in 1939.

Mm-hmm.

And do you have any early, early memories as a toddler, as a two-year-old or a three-year-old or something like that?

I have no memories of my parents. I have a very distant or vague memory of my grandfather, who at the time-- we lived in School. And around 1942, which was rather late for my parents-- earlier than that there was an edict for all the Jews to move to Amsterdam. So be ghettoized basically and make it easier to round them up.

My parents were in denial or tried to avoid that until the very last minute, which was around 1942. And so we moved into the second home of my maternal grandparents, because they, too, even though they lived in Amsterdam, they had to relocate from their original house to the ghetto area.

And that was the second home that you're talking about?

Well, no, it wasn't their second home. They were forced out of their home--

Into--

Yes. Now, because they couldn't keep up their home anymore, whether that was because of the war and the difficulties they had with the Nazis, or because, again, of the war, the business was not going so well anymore.

The one--

The diamond business.

Oh, the diamond business. OK.

That I don't know. But in any case, they relocated. And so my parents with my brother, who was eight months old or so at the time--

So he was born in 1941?

Yes, he was. We're about exactly two years apart. Myself and my parents moved in with my grandparents.

In this ghetto area.

In what I believe was a ghetto area. And so I remember my grandfather giving me some sweets basically. And that's about it. But I do remember then-- I don't remember the exact transition between that house and the home of my hiding parents, but I do have various memories of my hiding parents with whom I lived for about 4 years, from the age of two-ish till the age of six. And they lived in Amstelveen, which is a suburb of Amsterdam.

Amstelveen at that time-- well, as you can imagine, it's changed tremendously in those times. It's become a bustling mini city now. But at that time, it wasn't. I lived with them. I am still in contact with my two hiding sisters. I remember my hiding father and mother. I have been back to visit them-- who they are now deceased. But I had been back to see them a couple of times. And my hiding sisters, we just saw two years ago.

So you've maintained a lifetime contact?

Yes. And they are very open to that. In fact, two summers ago, the whole family went to Amsterdam with a specific intent, among other things being a tourist there and so on, of going to Dordrecht, where they live now, which is about an hour south of Amsterdam. And we visited them.

OK, we'll come to that in a minute. I still want to focus a little bit more on those years there where you don't have a direct memory-- you were young-- but you probably know the story of what happened. When your parents were in this town where the milk factory is--

School--

School. School. You said that the business was taken away.

Yes.

Yes. Do you know when it was taken away from them?

No, I don't.

So do you think they were running the business until 1942 when they left, or were they deprived of the business before?

No, I think they were running the business till at least 1942. And that's on the little film that I have. But I do remember-- I don't remember the exact transition of what exactly happened, but I do remember what happened when they moved into Amsterdam with my grandparents, where they didn't live with them very long. And they try to avoid obviously being deported. And they didn't heed the edict that the Nazis gave them. I don't know if they ever wore the yellow star or anything like that.

But I know that one day the knock came on the door, which was in 1942--

Of your grandparents' place?

Of my grandparents' place, which was probably in early August, late July of 1942. And luckily, my brother, an infant of eight months or so, was sleeping. And they knew enough-- he was sleeping in the bathtub for safety's sake. And you hear that-- you see it in the movies sometimes even in a thriller and somebody is looking, the gangsters are looking for somebody, take refuge in the bathtub, which I thought was a unique idea, but apparently it's not. But it was lucky for my brother that he was sleeping in the bathtub for his safety and that he was sleeping and not making any noises, because he was overlooked.

So what did they do?

So they took my parents and me--

Excuse me. OK, let's continue. I heard a noise.

They took my brother and my parents and me to the Hollandsche Schouwburg, which it's an old theater in the middle of Amsterdam, which was a rounding up place for transshipment to Wester--

So further--

[BUZZING SOUND]

There's some work done.

Yeah.

The landscapers.

We were talking, as the noise was happening, about being in this central place where you were taken with your parents, sort of like a transit area, holding area.

Yes, the Hollandsche Schouwburg, which is still there today. And it's got a big plaque on it. It was a theater. And they rounded up the Jews there for transshipment to Westerbork, which is a transship-- it's not a concentration camp per se, but it's a transshipment place.

It's a transit camp.

Yeah.

Yeah.

And my grandmother and grandfather went with, because at that time in 1942, the Nazis were not interested in older people. They were just interested in younger, working, able-bodied younger people to work.

OK. So I need to have a little bit of clarification. The knock on the door comes in 1942 in the late summer?

Yes.

Something like that?

About midsummer.

Yeah. Your brother, baby brother, is sleeping in the bathtub.

Yes.

He makes no noise. You and your parents are taken to this holding area in the theater. And your grandparents come with you to that theater?

To say goodbye.

Oh, I see. And so with your baby brother or leaving him alone?

No. No, I'm sure there was somebody in the house.

OK. OK. So they come to say goodbye because there's no danger that they would be taken as well, is that what you're saying?

That is correct.

OK.

Yeah. And so doing, my parents, sort of like a Sophie's choice, handed me over. And in the confusion handed me to my grandparents, and I went home with them. I was spared going to Westerbork.

Oh, my goodness. So it was kind of like last minute?

Yes, it was.

Do you have any memory of that.

No. That must be psychological. Well, and I was only two at the time. But I don't have any memories of that. I don't have any memories then of being placed with the hiding parents.

We'll get there.

OK.

OK. And you don't have memories of your mother or your father then?

No, I don't.

OK. That's quite a loss.

It is. I still feel that even when ladies go out to lunch and talk about their mother, I have nothing to talk about.

Yeah. What happened to them?

They went to Westerbork.

Let's cut for a second.

So what happened to your parents after they gave you over?

They went to Westerbork. And I went to Westerbork as a tourist. And I did some research on it. And I know that Westerbork was a transshipment camp that they set up as a functioning village. And you tried to make yourself useful, whether you were a secretary-- they had a band. They had a soccer team-- a good soccer player. You tried to make yourself useful so that you wouldn't land on the train.

So you wouldn't be on a list to be further deported?

Right. And every week they have-- I believe it was Mondays-- they published a list. And on Tuesdays, those people that were on the list were transshipped to Auschwitz. And it didn't take my parent-- my parents were not at Westerbork very long. And they were transshipped to Auschwitz, where they died. It is in the records. They died on August-- well, they didn't die. They were murdered-- August 8.

Of what year?

1942.

Oh, my goodness.



Yeah.

Oh, my goodness. So it was within weeks.

Exactly. And my aunt, my mother's younger sister was there as well. And she was there a little longer. They were not trans--

They were not deported together.

They were not deported together. But she wasn't there very much longer.

And you found these documents where?

My brother had written a letter to the Rijks Institute for war documents. And it is in their archives. We have a letter stating their exact dates of death.

When did you get that letter? When did he get that letter?

In the early '90s.

So half a century went by until you learned these things?

The exact dates, yes. And that was spurred by the Conference of Hidden Children, the first annual conference that they had in New York City at the Marriott Hotel, a huge conference. And that was really the first time I knew or I labeled myself-- I was able to articulate that I was a hidden child, because growing up with my grandmother, we were not encouraged to talk about it at all. She told us eventually, my grandmother told us what happened in vague terms, I think.

But we weren't encouraged to talk about it, because we didn't really suffer. We weren't in a concentration camp. We were well-- both my brother and I, although we were hidden by separate families, because it was too dangerous to be all of a sudden two kids turn up in one family, we were well taken care of, as well as you could be in times of war. And so we weren't considered to really have suffered.

But this conference, where, I think, if I'm not mistaken, about 1,600 people, all hidden children, turned up in one room, it was mind blowing. And that's what spurred my and especially my brother's research into more details.

In what way was it mind blowing? Tell me, if you hadn't really been affected before, what affected you now?

Well, we knew we were hidden children and that we had gone through this experience. And I never really thought about it. My brother is quite a bit more introspective than I am. But I never-- we were young. We were-- we didn't think about-- dwell on it that much.

Well, you know, there is a school of thought-- I'm going to kind of mention different schools, but there is a school of thought that says, and it's quite prevalent and makes sense in one way, that if you don't have direct memories of something, what is the loss that you suffered, because you don't remember the loss? You don't remember what you had in order to know you don't have it.

No, that's true. Mm-hmm.

And so in some ways, you're spared. But there is another school of thought that says we all experience things at different developmental stages of our lives. So how you will respond to outside stimuli when you're an infant, a toddler, an adolescent, a young adult in some ways is affected and influenced by what stage of your life in your development you're at. And I have heard people say that-- others who have been working with hidden children-- that sometimes the sadness and the sorrow from hidden children is so deep because they experienced these losses at such an early stage of life when

you need to have that sense of security, something is broken.

Whether you have a direct memory or not, when it comes back, when your history is something that you-- something happens then that a person who might have gone through true abuse and torture and so on but was an adult would have reacted to what was happening to them as an adult with the defenses that an adult can have. So I think that that is also as a result of that first conference that this thinking has developed as people got together and share their stories.

Right. Oh, yes. And my brother, who, as I said before, was only eight months old, he was in his pre-verbal stage. And it was separation anxiety for him on several different levels as he moved from one family and then from his birth family to his hiding family and then to a new life in the United States with a grandmother that he didn't really know and in a couple of other instances in his life where that happened.

So how old were your parents when they were murdered?

My mother was 22, and my father was 27.

They were so young.

Yes, they were.

They were so young. So your father had been born some time in the teens, is that the case?

Yes, my mother was born in 1919, and my father was born in, I think, 1915.

OK. What happened to his father, and his brother and sister? His sister, Rose Marie, and her mother, Lizzie-- the mother's name is Lizzie Israels-- they escaped to the south of France. But there, they were captured-- I don't know another word-- and also were deported then to Auschwitz.

I see.

And the brother, I think he went to England. And he died well after the war of other issues.

OK. And his name was?

His name was Stefan.

Stefan. And your grandfather on your father's side, your paternal grandfather's name was?

Samuel. I had two grandfathers, both by the name of Samuel.

So this is Samuel de Kadt.

Samuel de Kadt. And he died in 1938. I know that my parents married rather in a hurried fashion, because he was ill, I believe, with cancer. And they wanted his father to see them married. So they rushed the wedding a little bit.

How did they meet, your parents?

I do not know. I do not know.

You don't know how the families--

But they were in the same circles. They were in the same circle in Amsterdam. They went to school there. I don't know if they went to the same schools or not. But they met through mutual friends.

Were both families well to do?

Yes, they were, fairly well, yes.

And, OK, so we're at the train station. And you are given away to your grandparents. What happens then? What happens to them? To you? How do things, step by step, occur?

Well, I don't have direct memory, but they took me back to the house in the ghetto. And then they saw that it really was time. So they placed both my brother and me with hiding families.

How did they find them?

My hiding family was the sister-in-law of my grandmother's seamstress. And they were Catholic. And my brother's hiding family were also mutual acquaintances. I don't know the networking that they had to do for that exactly. And they were Protestants. So they were both righteous Gentiles.

OK. What's your brother's name?

My brother's name is Maarten, spelled the Dutch way.

How would that be? M- double A-R-T-E-N, like the island that everybody likes to go to.

That's true.

And we were both hidden in Amstelveen, the same little suburb outside of Amsterdam. But in my two-year-old mind, that could have been Australia. I didn't realize he was that close. He was very, very close in distance.

Do you remember being with your grandparents and then not being with them anymore?

No, I don't. As I said, I don't remember how that transition took place.

OK. And what did your grandparents do?

My grandparents then were deported in 1944. So what they did in the interim of those, let's say, a year and a half or so, I don't know.

What happened to them?

My grandmother survived Bergen-Belsen. And my grandfather did not.

They were deported to Bergen-Belsen?

Yes.

Amazing.

And my grandmother was a very strong woman. And she lived to the ripe old age of 93. But that was in-- and I hope I have her genes-- that was in a nursing home because she did suffer a stroke at the age of 86.

Oh, so her last seven years were not easy.

Right. Right.

However, how old was she when this deportation happened? If your mother was so young, then your grandmother must

have been quite young?

Yeah, everybody got married rather young. I don't-- well, we can go back. My math isn't great. But my grandmother in 1946-- well, she was born in 1895.

1895, which would have made her about 50?

In her early 50s, yeah. Because when she survived Bergen-Belsen, she was very ill. She was hospitalized for about three months while she recuperated. And then she regained her strength. And then she came to retrieve my brother and myself. And so she started a new life in America.

And why America? Why not stay in the Netherlands?

Because my aunt was in America, my Aunt Ella, who is now 97. And she lived in Queens, my aunt did, who had married herself-- she had gotten married in the interim and had two sons. Housing was very short after the war with all the immigrants. And that's when you hear that a Levittown had to be built.

That's right.

But they were able to secure an apartment directly above their apartment. And in those days, in order to do that, to secure an apartment, it had to be livable. So there was some furniture that had to stay there. And so we inherited some furniture from that. And we continue to live there and went to school there, et cetera, for a good 20 years.

I'm trying to imagine-- and I can't imagine-- but the losses that your grandmother suffered were enormous.

They were. And that's what I wanted to say. She was a single parent at the age of 52 with a generation missing. Before the name single parent was coined, she was a single parent. Of course, she had my aunt and uncle as support. But that's not the same. Support is good, but it was difficult for her.

And she had lost her own daughters.

And her husband.

And her husband. Yeah. And various other people. Yeah, it was.

And she never spoke about these things? She never spoke-- did she tell you about who your mother was and what kind of person--

Yeah, she did. I remember she sat me down when I was about 10 and explained sort of what happened without too many details.

How did she do it? Was it something that was now it's time for you to know kind of thing?

Basically, yes. She sat me down one afternoon. It was a difficult afternoon for her.

Can you tell me a little bit it?

Well, I don't remember much about it. She just sat me down and told me. And there were tears and so on. And I know that my brother wasn't told at the same time.

Had you had questions about where's my mom, where's my dad?

No-- well, I guess I did. But I know when we first came in 1946 that we were told, and I guess it was part of the denial process, that we would go back to Holland in a year. And we were hoping as young children that we would go back in a

year to go to our mother and father, which was our hiding parents. And my grandmother was hoping that the memory would fade. And I guess at the time, she thought a year was a long time. And the memory did fade.

Well, that was my next question. Did the memory fade of having been with another family?

Not entirely, because I still have memories of those wartime years.

We'll talk about that. But now we're on this thread, yeah. But right now when you're already post-war and you're in the United States, did this desire to go back to the Netherlands recede?

Absolutely, yeah. They Americanized me. The first thing that one of friends of the family did was he gave me my nickname, Willie, because it was American. And that stuck.

What language did you speak at home with your grandmother?

English. She was very much an enabler. She wanted us to speak English, because we were both ready for school. And in school, we had to speak English. So she spoke English to us.

What kind of personality did she have, your grandma?

She was regal. I remember her as being a regal woman. She was-- oh, she wouldn't like it if I said this, but she was a bit of a snob because of her upbringing. And she was controlling, I think. Very Dutch. But she wasn't very emotional.

Did you miss that?

Well, as you said before, I didn't know what I was missing. So--

And your Aunt Ella was she part of your life?

She was-- yes, she was. She was part of our life. But she had her sons, own sons, to worry about, and that's part of the story too. And there was some conflict.

Between the two?

Between my grandmother's allegiance to us, the poor motherless children, and my aunt's children.

Ah, and being the grandmother to these other children?

Yes, being a grandmother to all four.

Yeah. And did you remain in this apartment above your aunt for--

I remained there till I was beyond college, till about-- I went away to college. I felt the need to get away. I remained there till I got married basically, because I went to college and came back, got a job in Manhattan, and my other college friends at that time, oh, they all got roommates and apartments in the city. But I felt I couldn't do that. I had to keep my grandmother company. So I lived with her till I got married in 1963.

That's a long time. I mean that's 19, 20 years or something like that.

Yeah, it is. But in the meantime, I did go away to college.

OK. Can you describe the apartment to me? What it looked like, how many rooms there were, just a little bit of description.

Well, it was very-- I won't say Victorian, that's the wrong word-- but it was dark. She had dark velvet maroon drapes, but that was only in the winter, which she changed out and just kept the shears in the summer. It was two bedrooms. It was a big apartment by today's standards. She had her own room with a little bathroom. And my brother and I at first shared a bedroom. But then as we got older, there was a partition built, so that it divided that one room into two. And I think he probably still very vividly remembers that I got the big half and he got the small half, which was determined by the window placement.

Those things matter when you're a kid.

Oh, yes.

They matter.

Oh, yes.

And was it in an apartment building?

It was in an apartment building, a six-story building, which was in a nice neighborhood, I think, Jewish neighborhood. But it was near a park where we could go without having to cross the street and play. And our signal, as many kids of that era, when the street lights turned on, it was time for you to come home. But there was a big city park, forest basically, nearby. That was across another street.

What's the name of the neighborhood?

Kew Gardens.

Oh, in Kew Gardens. It's a nice area of Queens.

It is. It is.

Now, one of the reasons I ask is to find out, did your grandmother ever get any restitution?

Yes, she did.

OK. How did that happen? And in what form did that happen?

That happened-- I was not privy to those details. But my grandfather had a partner in Manhattan, whom we called Uncle Jack, who did the American branch of this diamond business. And he saw with legal means that my grandmother got restitution in the form of a monthly check, I believe, for the business for some years.

OK. Did she have to go to work at all when--

Yeah, she did. She did. She got a part-time job. The only thing that she knew was diamonds. So she got a job, first, at home, she learned how to string pearls. And she did that at home. And I remember her working way-- she was a night owl too, as I am now. She worked at the dining room table, because this apartment had a living room and a dining room, which the dining room was very dark with a fire escape outside of it, long into the night and whistling under her breath with WQXR on in the background. And then she got a job at a jewelry firm in Manhattan, where she went every day, but abbreviated hours, and strung pearls for them and continued her little cottage industry, so to speak.

Did she have-- I mean, clearly, the material aspect of life was nothing like what she had grown up

No, but it was very important to her.

OK. So my question is, did she still have money worries? Or was this--

Always--

Was OK? OK.

She always felt she had money worries. And we were, I think, raised a little bit as children of the Depression would have been raised very frugally, but yes and no. Because I remember in that apartment she entertained lavishly--

Did she?

Dinner parties for her friends. And the dinner parties were-- I mean they all outdid each other. They were in competition, she and her friends. So she would have a woman come in and help her in the kitchen. And she would have hors d'oeuvres. And by the time you finished with the hors d'oeuvres, you had no room left for dinner. But then you knew there was this heavy dinner coming, which she prepared for for a week in advance at least, with the good linen and the silverware and so on and so forth.

Why do you think there was such an attention to this? Why do you think this became the way it did?

I think it was status, as symbolic. And I think she wanted to do it. But that was all motivation for her to continue as much as she could with the way of life that she was used to, despite the fact that she no longer had the nanny for the children and the cook in the kitchen. She did want to continue as much as possible. But now she was restricted.

Was she a storyteller?

Not really. No, because we didn't ask her many questions. Both my brother and I somehow knew that we didn't want to hurt her by drawing out painful memories. We avoided the whole topic.

I mean I would have wanted-- I can't imagine this kind of loss because I have a mother. But I would have wanted to find out, what is my mother like? Was she a happy person? Did she have hobbies? Did she like doing this? Did she like going reading? What kind of books did she like?

No, we never asked those questions, although I do remember my aunt and my grandmother-- my aunt came up-- after dinner, my aunt and uncle would come up to our apartment. And they would have coffee or something and spend an hour or so chatting. But I do remember on occasion that they would sort of reiterate that a gesture that I made might have been similar to one my mother would have made, that sort of thing. But, no, we didn't we didn't ask.

And you didn't because you knew it was painful? Somewhere--

In part. And because I was too young to even realize. And as you said, again, I didn't know any different.

Yeah. Did your grandmother ever go back to the Netherlands after she came to the United?

She did. And we went back with her when I was 12 and my brother was 10. So that would have been in the late 1949, 1950.

Pretty early, pretty early after the war to go back.

No, maybe it was later. No-- yeah.

Mid '50s?

Yeah.

Or no--

No. It was around that-- I remember I was 12 and he was 10.

And what was the reason to go back at that time?

It was during the summer. It was vacation. And I think she wanted to go back and maybe take care of some business details. That I'm not sure about that at all. Maybe that's not even true. But she visited her friends. And we went with her.

And we sailed over and we sailed back on the Holland America Line, the Noordam. And there was a big storm one night. And I know that I was deathly ill, seasick.

Not a cruise experience?

No, not at all.

Do you have memories of that visit in the Netherlands?

Yes, I do, because she introduced me somehow or other to a girl that was about my age, a little bit older, who was a Girl Scout, as was I by that time. And we went to Girl Scout camp for a couple of days.

You still spoke Dutch at that point?

I think so, enough to get by anyhow.

And did she go back at any other time?

Not to my knowledge, not to my memory. She may have, but not to my knowledge, at least not with us.

Now, if not speaking about family and the losses and the people who are no longer there, did she ever talk about the war itself? Did she ever talk about the Nazi occupation? Did she ever talk about the more distant things that were historical about this time?

No, she didn't go there basically. I think she did let us know that she was very sick. But I can't honestly say that we talked about it very much at all. And I don't think-- whether I'm unique in that as a hidden child, I don't think so.

What about her own girlhood and her own growing up that was pre-war?

She talked about her siblings and her life in Amsterdam. But not all that much, not all that much.

That might have been painful too, because it was the world that no longer was.

Right. She had a sister in Amsterdam, who-- now that you mention it, I do remember some sort of a transition between the house, the ghetto house, and my hiding house is that we stayed-- no, that was when I was older. Being taken away from my hiding parents and transitioning to America, we stayed with my grandmother's sister in Amsterdam for a few days.

OK. What year did your grandmother die?

She died in 1988.

Wow.

She was in the nursing home for six years.



What did you call her?

Oma.

Oma.

That's what my grandchildren call me, Oma.

So she never became like mom?

No, she was Oma, definitely grandmother. And my children called her Oma, even though she was their great grandmother. But because she was so young, and just going around about town and so on, many people thought she was my mother. And my children, I believe, never really thought of her as their great grandmother, but rather Oma, which is German, Dutch.

That's right, for grandma. Yeah. Let's break at this time. Hand on a second.

So before the break, we were talking a lot about your grandmother and what was she like and how she soldiered on and the way she did it and how she brought you and your brother up. I want to return back now to a part of your story that we haven't really touched on. And that is when you were hidden as this young toddler in the Netherlands and what was involved with that. So let's go back to the point where your grandparents realize that it's time to disappear, or at least have the children disappear. What do they do? And where do you go?

Well, I went to a very strict Catholic family in Amstelveen, not far from Amsterdam. And they had two biological daughters. And they squeezed me into their home, even though I thought it was palatial, but that was not the case after I came back some years later. And I became part of their family.

What was their name?

The parents, he was Jan van der Zijden, and she was Cornelia van der Zijden. And the two girls were Anka, the older one, and Corrie, which is a nickname for Cornelia. Corrie I would say is about five years older than me. And Anka is 8 years older than me or so. I'm not sure of their exact birth dates. And I'm in touch with both of them--

To this day?

Well, more Corrie. She is the more computer literate. And Anka, unfortunately, I just learned six weeks ago or so has just had to be put in a nursing home because she had a fall and she suffers some form of dementia, which can only get worse, not better. And those two ladies married brothers.

Did they?

So they have the same last name. And I think that's part of the whole story that their worlds were very close. Their circle was very close. So they married brothers.

They are devout Catholics--

To this day?

To this day. They both have four and five children apiece, who are very devoted. The children are very devoted to them. And they-- Corrie anyway raised-- I'm sorry, mama, I call her now, Mama van der Zijden. They raised me as they would their own daughters. And I never knew the difference. I wasn't hidden, to my idea, not like an Anne Frank was hidden. I could go wherever they went and do whatever they did. And I remember some outings that we went on. And I know I went probably-- I don't remember being in church with them, but I'm sure I did go.

I remember that during those war years, I remember blackouts. I remember being very fearful of anything in a uniform. Whether it was the milkman or the postman or a Nazi, I couldn't discern. But when somebody rang the bell and it had a uniform on, I ran and hid under the dining room table, which to my mind was a safe place. And I also remember going to sleep with my hands up in the air in the surrender position, just in case. So I do have those memories.

I remember playing in a bombed out-- I don't whether it was bombed out or just an incomplete foundation. That I don't know. But we played and used it as a balancing beam and played as children will in that foundation.

And I remember because I was hidden with them during the winter of 1944, which was in the history books a notoriously bad winter, and that coupled with the destruction of the infrastructure, many people died who weren't Jewish. And there was where I did some research too. About 20,000 Dutch people died from starvation, never mind their religion, because there was no food.

So I remember standing in line at the soup kitchen, where we got what they called was soup, basically very watered down broth of some kind with a couple of cabbage leaves floating in it. I remember eating potatoes. One day we ate the potatoes--

Raw or--

No, cooked.

Cooked.

But they saved the peels. And the next day we would eat the peels. And I remember that we had to eat tulip bulbs.

Oh, wow.

And that I don't remember personally, but I know someone said that wrecked damage with your stomach. It wasn't good for your digestive tract. But that was all that there was to eat. So those are the sorts of things that I remember from the war years.

But I also have good memories-- playing in the street in the neighborhood with the neighborhood children.

Did you have another name? No, I did not, but my brother did.

So your name stayed--

Wilhelmina.

Wilhelmina. But your last name became--

(TOGETHER) Van der Zijden.

And I have a little book that when I was able to write, I wrote my initials-- W. V. D. Zijden. So I did take their last name.

And your brother became who?

From Maarten, they changed his name to Thys.

Thys?

T-H-Y-S.

Is that a typical Dutch name?

I think so, although I've not heard it before or after. But I think, yeah, it was.

And these memories that you have, they would be your earliest memories if you only have sort of remembered your grandfather giving you sweets before and no other physical kind of image in your mind.

No, that's true. That's the only childhood memories that I have.

What were those people like, your hidden parents, as you call them? What kind of personalities did they have that you can recall?

Well, I don't think I could tell you their personalities, except that they were my mother and father. They were kind and loving. He was a businessman. I think he was an accountant. And she was a stay-at-home mom. She had her hands full.

And I what kind of suspicion I aroused because all of a sudden I was there, I think they said that a cousin had come to visit, or niece, their niece had come to visit. And it was OK. I had dark hair, and so did my hiding father. He also had dark hair, because otherwise--

It could be a real discrepancy.

Yes, it could have been.

OK.

Yeah.

And she was the sister-in-law of your grandmother's seamstress?

Yes.

OK.

Yes. And the sisters were my big sisters. And it's very funny, because when I went just to see them without my family, without my now grown children, in I think it was 2003, and one had me over for lunch. And besides marrying brothers, they lived very close in geographical distance to each other. So we went to dinner at the other one's house, at Corrie's house. And when I said, can I help you, oh, yeah, she said, just like a big sister would, you can do this and you can do that. So the roles after all those years continued.

Yeah. Do you remember any incidents of playing with them, with the two girls?

Not per se, no, although I'm sure I did. I must have.

Did you have false documents? Were there any false documents--

I have no idea.

OK.

See, those are good questions. You're giving me homework to do.

It's just curious because how does one hide a child and how do you make it secure?

Well, the neighborhood knew. The neighbors knew. And they didn't betray me, like Anne Frank was betrayed, even in

her hiding attic. And many people were betrayed. And I know that Corrie told me that there was one particular neighborhood who they didn't-- neighbor, rather, that they didn't quite trust. But that turned out to be OK. So the neighbor--

So how do you know the neighbors knew? Did they--

They told me. Corrie told me. The hiding sister told me years afterwards.

Uh, huh.

Yeah. And when I did ask them, why did you do this? Why did you-- because it was life-risking to do that. And they just felt morally obligated. And they did it because they felt they had to, as did a lot of people, even though there was bounty on your head if you were betrayed. People were betrayed even by Dutch policemen, who got money for it.

Speaking of money, do you know whether or not there was anything that your grandparents gave to them to help them maintain you?

Yes, I'm sure there was. I'm positive there was. How much? How often? But I'm sure that they were compensated.

OK. OK.

Yeah. They were.

And what about your brother? Now, you wouldn't have direct experience, but what was his family like? And who were they? You said they were Protestant and they lived in the same town.

Yes. And I don't know exactly the connection to my grandparents, what the connection was, but they were at the time a childless, young couple, who were willing to take my brother. And my brother had very close ties with them long after he came to the United States. Mika, that was the man-- and her name escapes me. It'll come to me-- [? Jolas ?] were very devoted to him and took care of him. And after he left, then they had their children.

Oh, so they did have children.

I think she had trouble conceiving, but I think Marty helped them in his own way with that. They had two daughters.

Afterwards.

Mm-hmm.

OK.

Lotte was her name.

Watte?

Lotte.

Lotte. And their last name was?

[? Jolas. ?]

[? Jolas. ?]

Yeah.

Did you meet them?

I did, yes. I did, because we went back. Martin, his daughter, and I went back in maybe 2002 or '03. And we went to see the factory as I said. And then we went to visit them. And they both lived well into their 90s. But they have now been gone for a while.

OK. Did the two families ever meet, the two rescuing families?

Well, I'm sure they must have met, because my brother came to visit me in Amstelveen, although I didn't realize he was my brother. He was a friend.

Really? Oh, so they knew of one another?

They knew of one another. And they arranged an occasional, very occasional, meeting of which also I have some photos of him and myself sitting in a family group with my hiding parents. I don't have any pictures vice versa, of me going over to their house, although I know I was there. I have a memory of being--

Do you--

At their house.

Yes?

Yeah.

That's unusual. I mean I think that that's quite unusual that they would take enough care that you don't forget that you have a brother and that he comes to know that he has a sister--

Yeah, but we didn't know we were-- they didn't reveal that.

I know. Yeah. But that you're in one another's lives.

Yeah. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Yeah. It sounds like a very thoughtful gesture, because you can't explain any other reason for it. Why would they do that?

Mm-hmm. I'm sure they both were compensated.

And you were there from what time to what time? Now, you may not remember being there, but do you know the date at this point?

Not the exact date. But I'm sure that if my parents were taken away in early August, that--

'42--

In 1942, that we placed not long after that, not long after that.

So it would have been that calendar year?

I'm sure, yes.

Do you know when your grandparents were deported from Westerbork?

To Westerbork?

Yeah.

In 1944.

So they stayed another year and a half.

Yes. And I think also because they were older that they weren't taken earlier, and they weren't able-bodied workers. Or they were, able-bodied, but the Nazis weren't interested in older people because--

That's so unusual in some ways, because it would have been-- if you were to take the logic that seems to have been exhibited at Auschwitz, when the trainloads came to Auschwitz, people of your grandparents age would have been moved to the line that goes to the gas chambers, and people of your parents' age would have been kept alive to do labor. And yet it's the reverse that happened in a sense that very young people who were at the prime of life.

But I think it was my parents were deported in '42. And I think that was the beginning of the mass murders. And there maybe-- you know, one train load came in to Westerbork and they had to make room for more. So one train load went out to Auschwitz.

Yeah. Did you ever have any contact with anyone from your father's family?

Yes.

OK.

Yes. I have a cousin twice removed, or however that works, I'm never sure, who I am fairly close to. She lives in Greenwich, Connecticut. And she has told me more than one time that if it wouldn't have worked out with my hiding parents that she would have adopted us. But, you know, even though-- no, if it wouldn't have worked out-- my grandmother would not have survived the concentration camp, she and her husband would have adopted both my brother and I.

And so this would have been-- were they in the United States during the war?

No, they were in England.

They were in England.

And her husband has his own story about going-- he was a diplomat. He went through Sweden and escaped through there, quite an interesting story that he has. And she drove an ambulance--

In Britain?

In Britain, yeah, in the London.

He was a Dutch diplomat?

Yes.

OK.

Yes.

So what happened with your grandmother and her daughter in southern France? What ended up being their destiny?

There was no daughter. That was my father's side of the family.

That's what I'm saying.

OK.

So what happened with them?

My father's sister, Rose Marie, and her mother--

Your grandmother.

My other grandmother, that is true. But I never--

You never knew her.

No. Never knew her. Lizzie Israels. They went to the south of France, where a lot of people went. And some didn't make it. Some were captured there. And they eventually ended up in Auschwitz.

Oh, I see. So they were killed as well.

Yes, they were.

I see.

But I know that Rose Marie, I think in southern France, had met a French colonel, a Christian, with whom she had an affair and a child out of wedlock. And when the danger came for the mother, the father took-- I assume-- he took the child with him, so that my cousin, who now lives in Paris, whom we also met on that famous trip to Holland two years ago, Jill, my daughter's family, we all-- Glen, my son, and his family, Jill, my daughter, and her family, all went to Amsterdam together. And we did everything in Amsterdam, including visiting the hiding sisters together. But then Glenn, he went to London. And Jill and family, we went to Paris.

To meet your cousin?

Among other things, to meet my cousin. And because Caitlin, their daughter was taking French at the time in high school and total immersion. And she got as far as saying merci, and that was it.

But that also, such a tenuous connection, but nevertheless one that you follow up on.

Yes, because she's my first cousin.

Yeah, the child that the--

The child who is a couple of years younger than I am.

OK. How much of her mother did she know?

Not much. No, because then the colonel married, remarried. And the woman that he married raised that girl, my cousin and so became her mother. That's all she-- Marie-Louise knows that woman, who is now deceased, as her mother. That was her name.

And your cousin's name is Maria Louise?

Marie-Louise.

Marie-Louise. And her last name? Her married last name Kornbauer, a very French name, right.

Funny how those things happen, you know.

Yeah.

And your father's other brother, who was Stefan, I believe.

Stefan, yes.

He ended up in Britain?

I believe so, yes.

And did you ever see him, meet him?

No, I don't remember seeing him. But I know that he was married three times. And I know that a daughter that he had, my cousin also, lived in Great Britain outside of London in Kent. And she died recently. She was a bit older than me.

OK. We talked earlier about reparations that were made to your grandmother from your mother's family, that is from the business that they had on that side. Were any reparations ever paid to you and your brother through your father's side?

We got reparations through the Maror. Is that possible. We got some reparations, yes, we did. And I have a record of them. But it's not on the tip of my tongue. But they weren't-- I mean they were--

And who would it have been from, the Dutch government, the German government?

The Dutch government.

The Dutch government. And it would have been for whatever holdings, assets--

I think pain and suffering type thing.

OK. OK. So there was no one that you could really learn from what your father was like as a person? No one you could ask?

No, I could ask Aunt Ella. I asked her and my cousin in Connecticut. And from Ella was never fond of him, because I think he was a bit of a ladies' man. And also, he was in denial of this whole Holocaust that was about to befall him. And he aligned himself with a lot of Christian friends, thinking that's the way he could escape it. But he didn't.

And Mario, my relative in Connecticut, they were in the same social circles, because that's the de Kadat family.

Right. So she knew him from that?

Yes, as a growing up and as a schoolboy. And he was always a live wire and had a lot of friends and so on.

So there's bits and pieces of information that you got about either parent are really fragments.

Very much so, yeah. Very much so. Yeah.

Do you remember leaving your hidden parents? Do you remember when your grandmother came back? And now,



you're about five or six years old.

Six, yeah.

Do you have any memories of that?

I have a vague memory. I'm sure there must have been tears, because we were going on a trip I think. That's what they told us. And they took us in a car that had a back rumble seat. And I think that was more interesting to me than anything else.

And you probably didn't remember this, not elderly lady, but older lady, who was your grandmother.

No. I know I didn't. That memory is very vague. And then I think we stayed in Amsterdam with my grandmother's sister for a few days. I remember the airplane ride that we took from Amsterdam to LaGuardia on a prop plane. And my--

Wow.

Well, it was 1946, right?

But you went back by boat three years later, or four years later.

Yes, but that was a vacation. This was more of a hurried type thing. And that my brother was running up and down the aisles. And my aunt and uncle met us at LaGuardia, Aunt Ella and Uncle Dick. And Maarten had to go to the bathroom. And he was wearing a very complicated pair of trousers that my uncle had a great deal of difficulty helping him to the bathroom.

These are the things that are important for children.

That's what I remember. And that I had my first orange at the airport.

Oh, did you? Yeah.

Because having just gone through that hunger winter, you didn't get to eat oranges.

No. No. And do you have any memories of how you felt about your grandmother at that time or--

I don't.

You don't.

I think psychologically somehow I blocked it out.

Let's go into the 1950s a bit.

OK.

And you're now ensconced in the apartment in Kew Gardens. And you've been to the Netherlands and back again on this visit. And does your life turn entirely to American things and growing up--

I think so--

And going to school and things like that?

Going to school. I remember being in the first grade. And the teacher at that time did the first grade and the second

grade for the same kids, who was a very kind woman. I even remember her name-- Miss Kruger. She took me under her wing. And I think she was instrumental in helping me learn English as quickly as I did.

And I was a good student. And I skipped the third grade and went to the fourth grade. And to this day, because to this day, they teach the multiplication tables in the third grade, I skipped all of that. And my math is still pretty bad.

[LAUGHS]

And you went to college where?

I went to Colby College in Waterville, Maine. And part of that was that I wanted far away from New York. And how my grandmother did that financially, I think her reparations partially helped her with that. And I know that she probably had some jewelry that she sold to help both educate my brother and myself.

Both of you have higher education?

Yeah. Yeah, my brother went to University of Pennsylvania. And now he has a Ph.D. And I have a master's degree, but that didn't come till quite a bit later.

What did you study?

As an undergraduate, I studied French. And basically, that was my grandmother's big influence because she thought it was a beautiful language. And French literature is what I studied. And he studied-- well, he's an economist. So he was taught in that vein. And--

When you think of your grandmother, and it sounds like you had a mixed relationship with her from what you've told me-- there were positive things and then there was some things that were a little hard to take-- I don't know if I'm accurate in saying that.

Yeah, I think-- she was a strong willed woman. And she influenced us a great deal. Yes.

That's my question is how did she influence you in a way that stayed with you as part of your life, that got integrated into your life?

Well, I think she influenced me by her perhaps a rigidity, which to this day I'm trying to play it a little more cool. And she influenced my way of entertaining when I did entertain more than I do now, by taking care of my guests by the time the hors d'oeuvres were over, by her sense of order. And perhaps that's just a Dutch stereotype too, partially.

But it's a model. You saw her do that.

Yeah, the Northern European model.

Yeah.

And I don't know if she influenced me also by her lack of showing emotion. I think maybe I hold that close to my chest a little bit.

She also sounds like she was a true survivor.

She was a tough one.

Somebody who had endured many losses, multiple losses. And, as you said, was a single parent and forged ahead.

Absolutely. To the very end.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Your own children, you have how many children?

Three.

Three. You mentioned their two of their names before. Glenn--

Glenn and Jill and Andrew, who lives a mile away.

OK. Did you tell them much about your life, about your parents' lives, about your family, your Dutch family's life? Did they express interest in these things?

They only expressed interest I would say in the last 15 or 20 years, because, again, I think that hinges on the Marriott Conference in 1991, because I didn't know I was a Hidden Child. I had no label for it. And so they know my story now. They know my full story. And it is of interest to them.

But this was then again when they were already more adult?

I would say so, young adults.

Young adults.

Mm-hmm. Yeah.

If you can recall, what were the kinds of questions that seemed to be the most important to them to find out about?

They didn't ask that many questions. They just took what information I gave them. But-- maybe that's not entirely true, because when we went back to the Netherlands two years ago, and my son-in-law took a family picture of us near the original house, and I saw Glenn, who is now-- well, he was 45 two years ago-- and my son-in-law took multiple pictures. And this one is smiling. This one is frowning. But mostly everybody's smiling, except not Glenn. So I asked him, what was the matter?

Let's cut.

So when I asked him, why wasn't he-- why did he look-- he didn't look angry. He looked pensive. And he was just thinking about all the things that went on. And I think maybe that was the first time that he really reflected upon it in that depth. Because I think they too, because I didn't think about it myself, they had no reason to think about it either. I like to put it on the back burner.

Mm-hmm. Do you think that these events, of which you have no memory, how have they impacted who you are?

I often think about that. And I often think, not to be egotistical about it, but-- and for my brother too-- how come we turned out as well as we did? We're both highly ed-- fairly normal. Although there was on my brother's part, because he felt his separation anxiety--

You mentioned that, yeah--

That there was some therapy involved there. But, yes, I often think about how it affected me. It must have affected me. But I think I'd have to go into therapy too to find out exactly how it did. And I never saw the need for that.

Do you have a way of articulating it in what role this plays in your life now, in your identity now?

No, I don't think so, except that I am maybe a little close, keep things to my chest also, private.

You mentioned before that you're not particularly religious.

No, I'm not.

OK.

Spiritual is the word they use now.

It's a nice word. It captures the essence. Do you see yourself as Jewish? Is that part of who you are?

It's not a part of who I am. Although Glenn used to joke when he was dating that he had the best of both worlds because he could marry a Christian or because his mother was Jewish that he could marry a Jew as well. But, no, I don't consider myself Jewish. I have a lot of Jewish friends. And I sympathize deeply or empathy-- empathize is maybe a better word with the antisemitism that still goes on in their everyday lives and then what you hear in the media and so on.

And at Christmas, we celebrate it in a very secular way. And it's always been at my house. I took it over-- my grandmother always used to have Christmas at her house--

Did she?

With a Christmas tree and everything. She was an enabler. She enabled. She wanted to make that transition. And so when Christmas and Hanukkah are in the same time frame, we have the Christmas tree in one corner and the menorah in the other. And I have cousins who practice Judaism. But myself, no. And I think I can speak for my brother too. He doesn't do any-- although he married twice with a divorce two Jewish ladies.

And yourself?

Lutheran.

So you have a mixed--

Yeah.

Yeah. These are all very personal choices. You know, we live in a world where we can make those choices. In other generations, it was self-evident that you go by whatever-- your destiny was preordained almost.

Is there something that you'd like us to that I haven't asked about, that you'd like people to understand about what significance this had, these early years had, on you that came out after 1991?

It allowed me to identify myself as a Hidden Child and all the difficulties that are part of having been a Hidden Child and going through all of that. And I call myself a survivor too, just like my grandmother was.

Yeah. Yeah. I mean a very vulnerable one, who was by a hair's breadth.

Mm-hmm. Right. Right.

Yeah. Well, I'd like to thank you for sharing what you have shared today. It is much appreciated. And I know it's not always easy. And so that makes it a double gift. If there's a last word, is there anything else you would like to say for people to understand about what we've talked about before I conclude our interview?

I think that everybody carries baggage with them. And some are enabled through biology or just psychology to deal better with it than others. And so some are better survivors than others. And I'm grateful for being on the right side of the coin on that account.

I appreciate that. And thank you.

You're welcome.

And with that this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mrs. Wilhelmina Juhlin on July 16, 2015, in Morristown, New Jersey. Thank you again.